



Following Christ Together

*Sermons and Addresses
on Communion,
Service and Hope*

Gunnar Stålsett

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Introduction

This little book is about a great vision — the church as a communion.

The church is people bound to each other because they are bound to Christ. Discipleship, therefore, is never a lonely walk. You are always in company with other “followers of the way”, of every nationality and every age. The church is a fellowship which invites and welcomes individuals; it is not a club that individuals have decided to form. The church is both global and local, but only when it is truly local can it be truly global. To follow Christ is to live the mystery of communion with him in the realities of daily life. To live with him is a discipleship of freedom, justice and hope.

One of the many expressions of this discipleship is the Lutheran World Federation, a communion of 120 member churches on all continents with nearly 60 million members. It has been my privilege for nine years to serve this instrument for Christian unity and mission as its general secretary.

In the sermons and speeches from different contexts which are collected in this book I wish to share some reflections on communion, discipleship and hope. I do this with a deep sense of gratitude to all who made my ministry on every continent a joyful one. The nature of my work has brought me into close contact with church leaders, both Lutheran and of other confessions. But it was the people of the churches in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe who gave me lasting lessons in contemporary discipleship.

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Good co-workers in the Geneva secretariat made a heavy workload easier to carry. My thanks go to all of them, and especially to my excellent administrative assistant, Ingrid Krähenbühl, who among her many duties helped me to organize my work and make my manuscripts readable.

I dedicate this book to my wife Unn, my children and their families, who were constant companions in a global ministry which has always been close to home.

Gunnar Stålsett

I

One Church Made New

John 21:15-19

I have to start with a confession. I have expanded the text that was assigned by adding two verses. You will understand why. I could not face speaking about love and faithfulness to Jesus without holding open the possibility of suffering. The ministry to which Peter is being called is to get ready to go where he was not, at first, prepared to go. The editorial remark in the gospel is clear: in saying this Jesus was indicating the way in which Peter would die and bring glory to God (John 21:19). And *then* Jesus said, "Follow me." To speak of the love of Christ without a readiness to suffer would be to dream up a world of sunshine without any shadow.

Second, I want to emphasize the appropriateness of the theme "One church made new". It is a timely reminder that despite all our talk about the "the new church" there is no such thing as a new church. There is only one church, "the holy catholic church, the communion of saints". There are new structures, new leadership, new programmes, new challenges, but basically only one Christian church for all Christians — as Christ has only one body. But this church is always in need of reform, always in need of setting its faith anew in Jesus, always in need of expressing its love to him in

● Sermon preached at the constituting convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, May 1987, Columbus, Ohio, USA. The ELCA was formed from the American Lutheran Church, Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches and Lutheran Church in America.

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service to that world in which each generation of believers lives, always in need of being made new.

My third remark is about Peter. In the gospel of St John Peter has not been a dominant figure until this point. But through this account he is brought into the centre of things. This Johannine text may thus be seen as a parallel to Matthew 16:13-20, where Peter is described by Jesus as the rock, the foundation upon which Christ will build his church, and not even death will be able to overcome it. The Matthew text is ecumenically regarded as a central testimony to Peter's role in the apostolic church. John's gospel affirms that role in its own gentle, personal and warm style. But Peter is not standing outside the group of apostles, the apostolic *collegium*, nor is he as an individual anything separate from the church. Peter *is* the church and the church *is* Peter. Hence the appropriateness of this text today as we celebrate the renewal of three historic Lutheran churches which are, according to their outward structures, becoming one. Hence the relevance of this text to the calling of a bishop for this renewed church, a calling to an apostolic, Petrine ministry to care for the lambs of Christ.

In the calling and commissioning of Peter, Jesus indicates a priority which at first glance seems to be so simple that it is easily overlooked. When all the questions about leadership qualities have been answered, Jesus gives the search a new direction and a new depth by raising the question of love. Peter had denied his Lord and Saviour three times. Gently, Jesus restores him at the deepest level of his personality by offering him a chance to give words to his emotions: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" By asking this question, Jesus brings Peter back into the most personal and intimate relationship. The way Jesus poses his question may seem almost un-Christian: "Do you love me *more* than these others do?" It is neither enough to say that we are all sinners, nor that of course we all love him. There is a dimension of faith when you face Jesus alone, a personal accountability and a personal commitment. There is an I-you relationship to Christ which, deeply disturbing as it may be, is basic to all renewal.

The denial and desertion of Christ by the apostolic company and the church, especially by Peter, can be set right only in a new

face-to-face encounter with the risen Christ. Renewal comes not by order but by invitation, not by command but by calling. It expresses itself in a dialogue of love. "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" The renewal of the heart expresses itself in accepting the opportunity to say yes: "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Lord, you know everything: you know that I love you."

But renewal also finds expression in a specific *commission*. The three denials of Peter are overcome in the one commission, repeated several times: "Care for my lambs." Christ's words "follow me" express Peter's full restoration through Christ's forgiveness. For all who have failed and faltered and deserted Christ, he himself creates the opportunity for renewal. In those who have violated the new life, he himself brings forth a new creation, the new creation in Christ. No one who has had such an encounter with Christ at the deepest point of existence needs a dogmatic argument to be convinced of Luther's great insight that as Christians we live by grace alone, by faith alone, by Christ alone. Grace is not an entry in a theological dictionary. It is existential. It is life.

The renewal of Peter is the renewal of the church. The sending of Peter is the sending of the church. As Peter set out in his mission, restored by the crucified and risen Christ, so the church is called to express its Christ-love in people-action. "Care for my lambs." This is not an out-of-this-world mission. It is a mission as broad as the creation of God, as deep as the suffering of Christ, as radically renewing as the Holy Spirit.

There has always been a tension in the church between turning inward and opening outward. Closeness to Jesus, love for Christ has in the history of the church more often been expressed in isolation than in inclusiveness. Piety and spirituality have often mistakenly rejected the world which God created and in which he called us to live.

The Peter-Christ dialogue conveys a message of *closeness*. The image of caring for lambs — taken from the everyday life of that time — is one of simplicity. Love is thus translated into action. To be a servant of the mystery of Christ is to be transforming divine love into daily acts of witness and service, into Christ-commissioned *care*.

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To care is to tell the story of Christ, to name his name, to proclaim his mighty act of salvation which sets sinners free. To let the baptismal water flow over new generations to life in Christ and to celebrate the mystery of the eucharistic meal — that is to care. To call pastors to serve and to realize the priesthood of all believers — that is to care.

As Francis of Assisi discovered that sun and moon, wind and flowers, birds and beasts need the loving care of God, he expressed a new spirituality for his time. As he gave up a life of luxury to share his wealth with the sick and the poor, he interpreted for his time that love for Christ is care for humanity and creation. A spirituality of love and care for our time must be just as concrete and relevant. Grace and faith and love are dynamic and creative, expressing themselves in ever new applications. Therefore, as we celebrate a communion of care, we are invited to move into God's world.

The Christ-Peter encounter is one of closeness. In a sense, distance is no longer the issue in many parts of the world today. That is a privilege which places a heavy responsibility on us. In our cosy sitting rooms we can see over the horizon. From our easy chairs we face the starving millions. The destitute street children in New Delhi and Sao Paulo are as close as our own child across the well-laid breakfast table. In a matter of hours we can reach victims of earthquakes in Indonesia or human-caused disasters in Chernobyl or Bhopal. Through our efficient church offices we can make our pleas for human rights and human dignity heard in high places in East and West, South and North. Just as the communication revolution has overcome physical distance, so renewal in Christ must help us to overcome personal distance and emotional apathy: "Do you love me? Care for my lambs!"

Even distance in time is no longer as it used to be. The future is now. To love one's neighbour is to care for the next generation. To care for God's creation is to commit ourselves to our common future. Shortly before this convention, a message about that common future was issued by a United Nations special commission. It was a politically important message for which there is a Christian theology. The UN commission calls us to make room in

this finite world for a doubling of the world's population, that is, for another human world of the same size during the next century. The young people at this convention will still be alive when planet earth feels the dramatic effects of acid precipitation, global warming, ozone depletion and widespread desertification. Present environmental trends are already threatening to alter the planet radically, endangering the lives of many species upon it, including the human species. Cities, especially in the developing countries, are becoming desperate "hell holes".

How can we respond to Christ's commission to care in such a world? How can we speak about mission and evangelization, witness and service, without coming to terms with the realities of our common future?

Garrison Keillor, in his popular *Lake Wobegon Days*, portrays the attitude of a Lutheran from the midwestern US — indeed, a Lutheran of Norwegian roots! — in a short and striking sentence: "When I hear about deprivation and injustice in the world, I get up and change channels." But there are no other channels for Christians — none other than those which speak to us clearly about the real state of the world which God created and about the people for whom Christ died. When Christ saw the multitudes he pitied them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And there is no other love than that which expresses itself in care.

Let us not be confused by accusations of politicizing the church in our ministry of caring. It is not hatred but love that has compelled us to stand up for the rights of the blacks against the apartheid system in South Africa. It is not politics but biblically founded Christian social commitment that calls churches to stand up to be counted among the true peace forces of the world.

"Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed," said US President Eisenhower. Should not this same warning be stated with equal clarity and conviction by bishops and pastors and lay people in the church today, when the arms race has reached even more obscene proportions?

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It is not ideology but the teaching of Christ — theology and simple Christian faith — that calls us to take sides in the silent war of exploiting the masses of impoverished people in the South. The poor of the world are waiting for our renewal.

If the church wants to express in real and concrete terms its seriousness about love, about the care of humanity and God's creation, it comes to the point of having to take a stand, of saying, conscience-bound, like Luther: "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. So help me God."

It is the grace of God that says Yes to life. It is the grace of love that gives us the courage to care, the spirit to love, the conviction to act, the humility to pray, the faith to praise God for his promises.

As we step forward in a little while to receive the body and blood of Christ, we place ourselves in the Christ-Peter dialogue. Must we not, each one of us and all together, respond to Christ's searching question of love with the old prayer: "Look not upon our sins, but upon the faith of your church?" And must we not likewise say: "Look not upon the sins of your church, but upon the new creation in Christ?" Each one of us and all of us together will again be receiving the commission to be stewards of the mystery of Christ. From Peter, the martyr, we hear the affirmation of our calling: "You are the chosen race, the king's priests, the holy nation, God's own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

That is where we are today, on this day of renewal for the Lutheran churches in the USA and for the churches worldwide. It is a day of grace, of love, of commitment; a day of joy; the first day of a future in his own marvellous light!

2

Fulfilling the Vision

Revelation 7:9-17

Our text portrays the communion of Christians as seen in a vision of the future. But it also gives a vision for our work as churches and as individuals here and now.

This vision helps us to correct a wrong perspective in our concern for church growth and numbers. When we feel that "our mission" is not bearing fruit, that "our church" is not growing, that "our work" is in vain, this biblical vision invites us to lift our eyes and see the realities as God is seeing them. What is reality? It is a great multitude of believers which no person could number. We have our church membership books and our statistics, and surely, given a good organization of the task and a good computer, we could count all the actual church members in the world. And it would be a great number. We could count the Roman Catholics, the Reformed, the Lutherans and so on. We could number the baptized in Africa and Asia, and add those of the rest of the world. Indeed, the figures which are available show that the church is growing more rapidly in Africa than in any other place in the world.

But the vision of Revelation 7 is a different one. It adds two important dimensions now hidden to our eyes: all those who have died in the faith through the ages, and all those who, until the end of this world, are yet to come to faith in Christ. There are no

● Sermon preached at the All Africa Lutheran Churches consultation, Antsirabe, Madagascar, June 1987.

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statistics available for that. No calculations are possible — only a vision implanted by the word of God and seen by the eyes of faith. In that vision are also those who through the ages were the secret followers of Christ and who kept that faith through persecution and in prison. And there are all the unknown disciples of Christ under other religions.

It is heartening to know that in this vision of that great multitude are believers from every nation, every tribe and people. Because of the way we tend to read church history past and present, we need this vision to correct our disbelief. Only a few years back, during the cultural revolution in China, it was said among us that the church in China was dead and the believers were few. Suddenly we learned that the church of Christ had prospered and gained in life and strength during those years of tribulation. Today there is an active church in China, crowded public worship services and a courageous and clear public witness. The latest expression of the vitality of Christianity in that largest nation of the world is a printing press producing more than a million Bibles a year to be sold on the open market.

Two weeks ago in the city of Alma Ata in the Soviet Union, I experienced services with almost a thousand worshippers of all ages. Lutheran churches here have been faithful to their Christian heritage. They express their Christian faith in congregations which are alive and strong though they are without theologically trained pastors, Christian hymn books, Christian literature. They have certainly come out of great tribulations and are now bearing witness to their faith in an atheist society. They are evidence today of the reality of the vision: the saints shall come from every nation and people and tribe.

This is not new in the life of the church. The history of God's people in Madagascar tells the same story. And so, as we face the challenges of Africa today, the lesson of this text is: do not despair, do not lose courage, do not think small about the reality of the church. The followers of Christ shall come from every nation, from all tribes and people. Our part in fulfilling that vision is to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the

Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all he has commanded (Matt. 28:19-20).

As we contemplate our mission in the cities of Africa, we surely need to match statistics and vision. We need to match social, political and economic realities with the realities of the kingdom. We need to read the newspapers of today in the light of the scriptures, and the scriptures in the light of the daily news. We need to read the political realities in South Africa and Namibia in light of the message of hope emanating from the Bible. We need to think with one eye on the gospel and with one eye on the painful reality of everyday life. We are called to face human needs as they are disclosed in inhuman poverty, hunger, illiteracy, unemployment and illness. We are called to serve with unwavering commitment our fellow men and women, youth and children on the African continent. We are called to serve them with the love of Christ, with commitment to justice, with care for their material and spiritual well-being, a deep and basic concern for the whole person. At this time with the epidemic of AIDS, the churches especially are called not to follow the ways of the world and ostracize and isolate, but to include in a community of care those who suffer.

The result of this mission is expressed in the vision of Revelation 7 by those who came out of the tribulations. And the secret of success is that he is with his disciples always, in all sorts of days, until mission and vision is one reality on that great day of the Lord.

As a former servant of the Bible Society, my heart leaps joyfully at the vision of the faith being expressed *in every tongue*. It is reckoned that there are 5400 languages in the world. So far, the Bible or parts of it have been translated into fewer than 2000 of these languages. We must rejoice that the translation of the Bible has reached so many. But we must also continue to work for Bible translation for those who are yet longing for the word of God in their own tongue. The Pentecost miracle which we celebrated a couple of weeks ago, when people in Jerusalem heard the message in many different languages, is a sign of that day when the faithful from every tongue shall be gathered before the throne. Here in

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Madagascar, where people in every village and in the presidential palace celebrated the 150th anniversary of the translation of the Bible into their language in 1984, and where the history of the Bible is the history of the church, it is easy to understand that the vision of that day of joy includes those who have suffered for their faith. "These are they who have come out of great tribulations; they have washed their robes and made them white in blood of the Lamb."

The language and images may be different from those we use every day. A vision necessarily uses poetic language, images and symbols. But the reality of tribulation as described in this text is real, and it is not only the tribulations of individuals but also those of Africa itself.

Let us take heart for Africa under the promises of this text. Let us dare to read these words as a message of hope for Africa. Let us be instruments of hope fulfilled, of dreams come true, of prayers heard: "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun strike upon them or any heat" (v.16). To a continent in hunger and thirst, a continent in tears, we must dare to take this vision seriously, not for the distant future, but as a commitment to witness and service today. As we serve the Lamb on the throne, we must be the guide to fountains of the water of life for those who suffer. With our hands God begins already now to wipe away the tears from their eyes (v.17).

You are a singing people. You have many wonderful songs, and your worship is a joyful chorus. In this worship we begin to understand the text of the song before the throne, as we already participate in it. "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (v.10). We already sense the vibrations of the choir of angels before the throne as they shout and sing: "Amen! Blessing, and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever. Amen" (v.12).

Let that twofold Amen — at the beginning and at the end — be the sign under which we continue to serve. Let our lives be kept by him who says of himself that he is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Rev. 22:13).

3

Follow Me

Matthew 9:9-12

The text appointed for this third Sunday after Trinity in the lectionary of the Church of Sweden brings to us in the simplest and most straightforward way the call of Jesus: "Follow me!"

Everywhere Jesus went, moving from place to place, he related directly to the people. In some places they gathered by the thousands to see him and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36). At other times it was the need of an individual that occupied him, a father whose son was dying, a man born blind, a seeker who did not dare to come at daylight, a disciple who denied him, sinners set free. Everywhere and at all times the message was an invitation to follow him; "and Matthew stood up and followed him".

Jesus has continued his wandering beyond the limits of Palestine, beyond Judaea, Galilee and Samaria, from Asia to Africa and Europe and to the Americas, from century to century, from year to year. Day by day, he continues to call new generations: Follow me!

And people have followed him. Not always as readily as Matthew, who simply stood up and followed him. But they come from every race, tribe, nation and language — an enormous crowd which no one can number (Rev. 7:9).

In July 1947, forty years ago, here in this venerable cathedral in the city of Lund, a joyful celebration took place to express a

● Sermon preached during the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the Lutheran World Federation, Lund, Sweden, July 1987.

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readiness to follow Jesus in the new situation after the second world war. People came to this cathedral — bishops, pastors and lay people, victors and victims together — united under one call to follow Jesus. Here were people who in different ways had suffered the burdens of the war, like Bishop Berggrav from Norway, Bishop Ordass from Hungary, Bishop Lilje from Germany. All who came were seeking an answer to one burning question: What does it take for the Lutheran churches of the world to respond to the call to follow Jesus after this devastating war? In the message from this assembly, dated 6 July 1947, we read:

From those who have languished in prison cells, in dungeons and behind barbed-wire barricades came the cry: "Back to the Bible". They have discovered the Old Testament as the word of God in very truth. They have learned to know the apostles of the New Testament as their own contemporaries, as they have faced the evil in the hearts of men, and as they have witnessed the power of God to save.

There were not many in Lund from Africa, Asia and Latin America. Their number has grown, as can be seen today. They too have had the experience of struggling for freedom and justice, and they too have learned to draw on the living sources of the Old and New Testaments. Nowhere have the Psalms of the Old Testament been read with greater meaning than by black people under apartheid in South Africa and Namibia, or by the people in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Chile. The witness of the Lund assembly was a global witness in the ongoing struggle for human dignity.

It was under the word of God and at the communion table in this church that a new beginning was made, an inner renewal and an outward dedication. And they "stood up and followed him". The constituting of the Lutheran World Federation was indeed a response to the call to follow Jesus. The response took shape in a programme for the Lutheran churches of the world. It became an action to rebuild cities, to restore homes, to repair roads, to sow new fields, to care for body and soul.

It had taken two world wars and millions of lives before this communal way to follow Jesus in his care for a suffering human-kind was formed. In the silence after the last bombing of the cities

of Europe, under a sky which could never be the same again after the nuclear cloud over Japan, after the genocide of six million Jews in Hitler's gas chambers and concentration camps, the call was heard.

One who participated in the Lund meeting testified:

Those of us who have seen the weary pilgrims who make up the ten million refugees and displaced persons from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Bessarabia, Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Germany begin to understand what our Saviour meant for us when he said: "I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was naked, I was strange, I was in prison."

It was a call that posed a test to Christian faith, as it still does today. Are forgiveness and a new beginning possible? Can a new foundation for peace and justice be laid? Can a new vision be found for a life together? Is there not another flame than that of war — a flame of love that purifies the heart and melts hatred? Is there not a bond of faith which holds together that which has been rent asunder? Is there not a divine bridge of hope over the chasms of the hell created by human beings? The answer is Yes.

And they stood up and followed the call to a new healing ministry on every continent. Through the instrument of the Lutheran World Federation, which was born here forty years ago, Christ has been followed in the feeding of millions in hunger-stricken Africa, in the care shown to the increasing number of refugees on every continent, in proclaiming the gospel of peace, grace and faith in Christ to souls hungry for forgiveness.

In the forty years of the Lutheran World Federation, the call to follow Jesus has been interpreted as a call to mission and evangelization, a call to proclamation and development, a call to witness and service. It has been understood as a call to bring the gospel to those who have not heard of Christ and is being heard today as a call to re-evangelize secularized Europe. It is to be heard as a call to build bridges over divisions of ideology and to counteract the cold war, to recognize the simple but decisive human factor that the twenty million who died in the Soviet Union during the last world war were as dear to their families and their nation as the

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millions who died in Western Europe and on other continents were to theirs.

The echo from the assembly in Lund forty years ago is being heard today as a call to participate in the struggle for peace and justice, human dignity and human rights. It finds expression in care for God's creation, in love for generations yet to come, in a fervent plea against nuclear war and a compassionate call to overcome the exploitation of the impoverished masses in the South. This call to follow Jesus has led the Lutheran churches of the Federation to stand together with the blacks of South Africa in their struggle against the inhuman system of apartheid and to join them in their struggle for their rights as men and women, youth and children created in the image of God.

The reactions today are not unlike those heard when Jesus was having a meal at the table of one who did not belong to the "good society". The Pharisees continue to speak even in the churches and in the name of Christ: "Why does your teacher eat with such people? Why do you show preference for the poor, for the black, for the hungry, for the sick?" Jesus gave an answer: "People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick" (Matt. 9:10-12). Jesus sides with the suffering, the poor, the lonely and the sinners.

Jesus is at home in the overcrowded favelas of Latin America. He is welcome at the empty table of the hunger-stricken people of Africa. He shares prison cells in every land. He comes as the doctor to heal and restore, as the comforter to give new hope, as the prophet to proclaim a new future, as the priest to release from the burden of guilt and sin and judgment. People who are well do not need a doctor, but those who are sick do.

Why then is it that churches in Europe are empty while every house of worship in Africa is increasingly crowded? Certainly it would be wrong to assume that Jesus the physician is not needed in Europe. The quest for spiritual values among the young, their search for dimensions of life beyond material well-being, the simple longing for "the way home" reveal the poverty in which the affluent generations in the richest nations of the world find themselves. Their search for a new spirituality must be answered with

the testimony of Christian faith which reflects fully that God is the creator of this earth and of us all, that Christ is the Lord and Saviour of everyone, that the Holy Spirit is the giver of new life to everyone who is ready to receive.

In this lies the hope for our generation. He has come not to call respectable people but outcasts. For Jesus this meant keeping company with prostitutes, with those whose disease set them apart from society, with the ostracized and the isolated. That is also where he wants his church to be today. Where Jesus has opened the door and entered the house, the church dare not hesitate outside. "Who wants to serve me must follow me, so that my servant will be with me where I am," said Jesus to another disciple (John 12:26).

To follow Jesus is not to make easy and empty sacrifices. Rather, it is to show true and personal love in service to those who are in need. It is to take options which are costly both individually and for entire nations. Mercy and justice belong together, as the prophet Isaiah tells us. Deeds are more important than words. "The kind of fasting I want is this: remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free. Share your food with the hungry and open your home to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear, and do not refuse to help your own relatives" (Isa. 58:6-7). With the call to follow Jesus, we are again sent to serve all those for whom he offered the greatest service, when he gave his life on the cross.

A fortieth anniversary is more an occasion than a cause for celebration. It is an occasion for recapturing the sense of urgency that led to the foundation of the Lutheran World Federation. We need to demonstrate in everyday life what it means for our generation when Jesus says to us today: "Follow me!"

The apostle Paul sums it all up: "We are ruled by the love of Christ, now that we recognize that one man died for everyone, which means that they all share in his death. He died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but only for him who died and was raised to life for their sake" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

As we modestly celebrate forty exciting years in the life of the Federation, we rejoice that as we are called to follow Christ we

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find ourselves in the company of others on the same road — Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Reformed, Baptists, Methodists, to mention only a few. On the road we have come to walk shoulder to shoulder, to listen to God's word together and to pray heart to heart.

We praise God for the gift of Christian unity which is bodied forth in the ecumenical movement to which we belong, as we open ourselves to company with people of other faiths and ideologies, as we enter the path of peace, justice and care for creation. As we look round on this day of celebration, we are indeed beginning to forget names of national and regional Lutheran churches and beginning to understand ourselves more as a communion of churches. A vision already present in Lund is now more clearly set before us:

Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body... And all the different parts have the same concern for one another. If one part of the body suffers all the other parts suffer with it. If one part is praised, all the other parts share its happiness.

As part of the one body of Christ, let us go with him as he cares for a broken and bleeding humanity. The call has echoed through the ages, and it sounds for us today: "Follow me!"

4

The Fullness of Him Who Fills All in All

Ephesians 1:15-23

At this Lenten time we are reminded of the suffering and death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, but we are also strengthened in our faith by his resurrection and victory. The Lenten season calls us to consider the role of Christ as servant. It reminds us that in our baptism we are called to serve him. And we know that only if we are with him through the pains of Good Friday shall we truly rejoice with him on Easter morning. So it is also fitting that on this last Sunday in Lent your church celebrates the consecration of sisters to diaconal service. With the churches of the Lutheran confession worldwide, I rejoice with you on this day of grace. In the communion of our faith you are surrounded and supported by brothers and sisters on every continent.

It is important that the churches do not lose direction and hope at a time when so many changes are taking place in Europe and on other continents. You in Poland have also experienced a great transition from dictatorship to democracy. Yet for many nations there is a long way to go to stabilize their new life and to reach the stage at which all people, regardless of faith or ethnic identity, are equal before the law and in the life of society.

In the text from Ephesians 1 we are helped to see some important factors in the life of the church and in our personal lives. If these factors are taken seriously, they will also influence the life of the nation. It is a text about thanksgiving and prayer.

● Sermon preached at the Lutheran church in Dziegiełków, Poland, on the last Sunday of Lent, 5 April 1992.

Paul writes to the Christians in Ephesus of what he has heard about their "faith in the Lord Jesus" and their "love towards all the saints". This fills him with thanks to God.

From this we learn that our relationship to Christ is seen through our love for other Christians. As we see the many signs of positive relationships between different churches we give God thanks and praise. Especially here in Poland we should remind ourselves of twenty-five years of dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches on the international level through the Lutheran World Federation. We have achieved a level of mutual understanding which urges us to put it in practice. Only when our agreements in theological conversations are translated into concrete expressions of mutual acceptance, which can be seen and heard in the life of the nations, will there be real joy. The way to greater Christian unity — to *visible* unity — is a way of love not of hatred, a way of practical steps not of theory.

Paul continues his greeting to the faithful in Ephesus by telling them that he is praying for wisdom so that they may know God and his wisdom. This wisdom relates to the way we are called to walk as Christians. Today we are very much aware that we need wisdom from God if we want to promote unity among Christians and justice, peace and reconciliation among the peoples and within each nation. Especially we are called to discern the difference between a true national pride and identity and a nationalism which sets one ethnic group against another and which leads to destruction and war. Paul's admonition to and prayer for the Ephesians are also important for us today: that through God they may know "with the eyes of your heart enlightened, what is the hope to which he has called you".

In order to find oneself and to be willing to share with others it is important to shed all negative feelings of being a minority. Instead, we are invited and urged to see how rich we are. We are encouraged to appreciate the gifts God has given us — to know "what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints". In our Lutheran tradition we have been given the great gift of seeing the centrality of God's grace alone for our salvation. This is a precious gift to be shared with all. It is a gift which inspires us to

mission and evangelism. Paul dares to talk about unity with other Christians as a foreshadowing of the glory to come. This glory is not for Lutherans alone but for all God's people.

Finally we should underscore today with St Paul that as believers we have been given a tremendous power, "so that you may know what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power". Are we aware of this power? Are we ready to use it, not for ourselves but in Christlike service for others? "God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places... And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church." How can we continue to be pessimistic or afraid when we have been given this power? How can we let ourselves be dragged into quarrels about unimportant matters when we have greater tasks to perform? So when we look at the turmoil around us we should remember: "God put his power" — without exception — "to work in Christ".

What then of us and our church? God has made Christ "the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all". From this fullness we are born. In this fullness we are upheld. With this fullness are we called to serve and to celebrate the crucified and risen Christ.

5

Hearing the Cries of the People

Exodus 3:4-12

Today on the historic occasion of the ordination of the first woman bishop in a Lutheran church anywhere in the world, I would begin by underlining the importance of the goal of the full participation of women in the church and in society. This is an especially joyful day. We are witnessing an epoch-making moment in the history of the Lutheran churches not only in Germany but throughout the world.

Our text is the well-known story of how God used a human being, Moses, to bring freedom and sustenance to an oppressed people. Through it we shall see how even today the Old Testament helps the church, the people of God, to understand how God cares for his people and his world.

In this story God speaks to his servant Moses about the Israelites, who are suffering in slavery and distress in Egypt and crying to God for deliverance from captivity. They are longing for a future in a country where they and their children can be free. God says to Moses, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them... to a good and broad land... The cry of the Israelites has now come to me."

Like most Old Testament passages this story is absolutely realistic. The reference is to a real people in a real country in a real

● Sermon preached in the Church of St Peter, Hamburg, Germany, 30 August 1992, on the occasion of the ordination of Maria Jepsen as the first woman bishop of a Lutheran church.

conflict. A real person is summoned to act. And a real God is concerned. This is not a text for people who do not know the meaning of suffering and aggression, who are content to remain where they are because in their country milk and honey are already flowing.

On the other hand, perhaps it is. Perhaps this text is also summoning us to a new relationship with ourselves and with our neighbours and with God.

At the eighth assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Curitiba, Brazil, in 1990, we came together under the theme "I have heard the cry of my people". Lutheran Christians from the whole world reflected on how God hears the cry of human beings today. The context in Curitiba was global. People from every continent were present — people who had brought their sufferings and their hopes with them. For the first time our Lutheran brothers and sisters from Siberia and Kazakhstan were among us, including the so-called Volga Germans, whom Stalin sent into exile and imprisonment to the utmost bounds of what was then the Soviet Union. People were also present from countries afflicted by civil war and famine — Ethiopia, Liberia, El Salvador. And our member churches from all the countries in Eastern Europe were also there, not yet knowing that the time of their oppression under a Marxist system would soon be past. We met on a continent which was preparing to commemorate the controversial five hundredth anniversary of the voyage of Christopher Columbus; we met in a country where the fate of the Indians in the Amazon rain-forest has come to exemplify the close interconnection of human destiny and nature. Our Bible studies were led by pastors and teachers who acknowledged their commitment to a theology which reads the Bible with the eyes of the poor and oppressed, a theology of liberation.

In this context of a theology of liberation today's text is bound to shake us out of our complacency and indifference. God says, "I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them."

Where do Europeans stand today? Is Europe, which lay in ruins after the world war, heading once again to a human and moral

catastrophe? Has the joy at the reunion of brothers and sisters who had been separated by walls of stone and ideology been so short-lived? After seeing in the image of a "common house" the harbinger of hope for so many people, is Europe once again on the road to new ethnic, racial, religious and national conflicts? The tragic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Northern Ireland are a disgrace to human civilization in Europe. Xenophobia and attacks on foreigners are on the increase in many European cities. Is this a return to the worst chapters in European history? What does it mean for the Christian church in this continent, in this country, in this city?

When we listen today to the cry of the millions of new refugees and asylum-seekers in Europe, and see the pictures of emaciated children in Somalia, where the worst famine disaster ever to strike a country is rampant, can we still dare to say that God has heard the cry of his people?

Truly this cry for help and justice is a challenge to our faith. And we can dare to say that God has heard us only by way of expressing our faith in God as the Lord of history who cares for his creation. As the passage from the epistle for today confirms, "by grace you have been saved" (Eph. 2:5).

This expression of faith prompts us to ask, if God has answered our prayers, has his church also been listening? God called on Moses to free the people from their distress. Today God calls his church to commit itself to peace, to stand up for the oppressed and exploited, to give the homeless a roof over their heads and to feed the hungry. God also answers our prayers today by commissioning us: Go to people in the cities, countries and regions in Europe. Go with food to the people in Somalia. For us who live in affluent countries our faith, our Christianity is being put to the test not by what we say but quite simply by the things we do.

The world has had enough of words from the churches: now it pays attention to our body language, our service. Christ's body language, expressing the fact that he was the Suffering Servant, was manifested on the cross and in the resurrection. And that frees us for a ministry in love, sympathy and energy, which flows from grace alone. As Paul says, "so that in the ages to come he might

show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7).

At a time when Christian faith and Christian tradition are on the decline in Europe, especially in the West and North, we must remember that the God who sends us is the God of our ancestors. Must we not therefore strengthen our ties with the faith of our ancestors — and indeed even with the Reformation heritage — so that a spiritual renewal may take place in Europe today? In speaking now of re-evangelizing Europe we are talking about a new and inclusive spirituality, which includes the proclamation and communication of God's word, prayers, the use of the sacraments and a life of active diakonia.

The fact that our Bible text links this act of liberation and healing with worship is very meaningful: "you shall worship God on this mountain" — in this church. Thus our worship, our prayers, our listening to God's word in this church today liberate us for serving God and his people.

The church is sent like Moses to bring salvation to a world crying out for redemption, unity, human dignity, reconciliation and peace. Still today, to a weak and fainthearted church which like Moses is asking, "Who am I that I should go...?" (v.11), God is saying, "Fear not, I will be with you". Therefore in the parish and congregation of St Peter's we can confirm today what the Lutheran communion of churches united to say at its assembly in Brazil:

The biblical testimony is that God does hear the cries of the people. The response of God often comes in ways for which we are not prepared, but the Christian confidence remains that God continues to hear and to act as our redeemer and our destiny.

"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever" (Eph. 3:20-21).

6

God Unites

On behalf of the Lutheran World Federation, I am honoured to bring a word of greeting and encouragement to you as you gather for your tenth assembly under the powerful theme "God unites".

I say "powerful" because we all know deep in our hearts that this theme is much more than a vague and romantic hope; it expresses a confident confession of faith that God will do *now*, at this moment of history, what God has already done so many times: shatter the walls of hostility, bind up the brokenhearted, reconcile the estranged and set the captives free. God unites indeed!

This is a powerful theme for another reason. It summons us to be in fact, in reality, in 1992, that which God in Christ has called us to be, namely the one body of Christ, the one holy, catholic and apostolic church, in which there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, with one mission to one world. The question to us all — and here I include the Lutheran World Federation — is whether we choose to retreat into the comfort of our own little kingdom or to follow the God who leads us on the adventure of unity along risky, uncharted paths.

Let the events in Europe which threaten to overshadow the agenda of this meeting rather be seen as the real task before us.

What is the answer, if any, of the churches to the broken unity among the Christian churches? Will this meeting be able to draw

● Text of an address to the tenth assembly of the Conference of European Churches, Prague, September 1992.

the churches in Europe towards visible and credible Christian unity? We need to ask each other these days, *"how can we say that God unites if we persist in our conflicts and struggles?"*

What is the answer, if any, from us as communions of faith to a conflict in Europe in which Christian faith and Islam are pitted against each other? Can we continue to allow that to happen in villages, cities and regions of Europe while we are seeking a positive dialogue between Christians and Muslims on a global level?

Are we able to speak in a united way to the spiritual and moral situation in Europe with the voice of Christ who calls Europeans also to discipleship today?

The drama of a Europe divided by nationalistic and ethnic struggles forbids the churches to be silent or passive. We are rendering emergency aid; we are pleading with the warring factions to stop the brutality of war. But where is our uniting and reconciling gift as followers of Christ? Have we done enough?

We are shocked at communal violence in other parts of the world. Are we not too complacent about the attacks on asylum-seekers, migrants and foreign-born workers in our midst?

The Christian faith calls us beyond the narrow boundaries of national allegiance and confessional identity to faith in God who frees and unites. Only then can we address the moral breakdown of Europe and its culture.

Religious hatred makes the face of God invisible. Political hatred wipes out peoples' liberties.

We are not gathered together in Prague during these days simply to reflect on the dynamic forces at work in Europe or to analyze political and economic trends. We are called to *listen* — in worship, in the reading of the scriptures, in the heat of debate, in silence, in quiet conversation — for the in-breaking of God's word.

The question is not whether we have all the answers, but whether we are asking the right questions, and whether we have, as John asked, "an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Rev. 2:7). The question for us is not only "what does

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the new Europe mean for us today?" but also "in the new European context, who is Jesus Christ for us today?".

Dear friends, it is my hope and prayer that the one God of all nations — of Europe, yes, but also of Africa, Asia, South and North America, the God of the whole oikoumene — who frees, but who also unites us in the one body of Christ, will inspire your worship, guide your deliberations and lift your spirits in these days.

7

Story-Telling with a Purpose

Luke 1:1-4; 24:36-53

The Sunday of St Luke the evangelist is an educational and devotional opportunity for each of us individually and personally, for our community as a congregation and for the entire church to consider how our past and present and future are bound together in the church as the body of Christ.

"Many people have done their best to write a report of the things that have taken place among us," writes Luke in the opening passage of his report to "dear Theophilus". That is what reporters did then and that is what they should do now. Reporters are among the most revered among us. They may hold the fate of public figures in their hands or sway the history of nations. Sometimes they also report things that have not taken place.

"Things that have taken place." That is the history about Jesus. "They wrote what we have been told by those who saw these things from the beginning and who proclaimed the message." So why tell it again? Why does Luke, the physician from Antioch, the friend of St Paul, bother to write what he calls his own "orderly account"?

The answer is plain: "so that you will know the full truth about everything which you have been taught". The *full truth* is more than a collection of facts, incidents, events and who said what. On this Sunday when we honour St Luke we honour him as an *evangelist*, not as a reporter or historian. What is the difference?

● Sermon preached in Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, New York, on the Sunday of St Luke the Evangelist, 18 October 1992.

The evangelist has a message to proclaim. He deals with history, not with fantasy. He interprets history and reveals its real meaning.

St Luke also wrote the Acts of the Apostles to give an account and interpretation of the history of how the good news spread from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. The core of this message is: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). These are the words of a reporter and an historian, but they are the words of a reporter and historian with a message — not just any message, but the message that makes a difference: the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ. This breaking of the barriers of history, this transformation of facts, not into fiction but into faith, is what gives vibrancy and life to the story about Jesus from Nazareth. The lectionary for this Sunday wisely combines the opening verses of the first chapter of the Luke's gospel with the closing verses of the last chapter. They may seem to be worlds apart. Between these verses stands the death on the cross, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus. "I write this," St Luke said, "so that you will know the full truth about everything which you have been taught."

Bewildered disciples are helped to believe by seeing that the risen Christ is the Jesus born during the reign of Emperor Augustus when Quirinius was governor of Syria. In that post-resurrection encounter St Luke gives three important clues for the church to retain in its preaching and teaching:

First, everything written about the Messiah in the law of Moses, the writings of the prophets and the Psalms had to come true. Through the kaleidoscopic literature of the Old Testament runs a golden thread, pointing to the crowning of God's history of salvation of all humankind through Jesus of Nazareth.

Second, Luke encapsulates the whole saving history, including the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, in this one sentence: In his name the message about repentance and the forgiveness of sins must be preached to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem — and ending in Manhattan and in Rio and in Beijing and among other simple folk like the bushmen of Africa and the fishermen of Norway. Repentance and forgiveness *to all*.

Third, the apostles are witnesses of these things. You will receive the Holy Spirit, which will empower you to speak with clarity and conviction about the history of facts and the mystery of faith. To be a witness in the biblical sense of the word is to be involved, to be a part of the history, to vouch for its veracity with one's life.

These are the characteristics of the gospel ministry through all ages: telling the story of Jesus, proclaiming him as the risen Christ, the servant and the Lord of all, being illuminated and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit history is revealed as the setting of the gospel. This is the key to the renewal of the church for which we are all longing.

The story of Jesus the Messiah is an ever-unfolding story. It does not end with St Luke's account of how he departed from his disciples and was taken up into heaven. In a real sense, and not just in a manner of speaking, the history of the Christ continues in the history of the church. St Paul preaches to the Corinthians: "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). This is the mystery of the church in which we live. It is a mystery not in the sense that it is unreal; on the contrary, it is reality in the fullest sense. In our baptism by the Holy Spirit through faith we are born into the church. This body is formed and shaped through the preaching of the word of God. It is nourished and strengthened through the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ. Its breath of life is prayer; its energy is love. It is pushed by joy and pulled by hope.

The post-resurrection encounter with Christ had these constitutive and lasting elements: he blessed them; they worshipped; they thanked God and were filled with joy.

As with the history of Jesus, the history of the church may be presented as a report, an account of events. But the real sense is the message revealed and emanating from this history.

To be sure, the history of the church simply told is as much a history of deceit and defeat as of truth and victory. This is always the fate of the people of God. In a sense this is fully accounted for in the Old Testament. No book of faith in any other religion

records failures, sins, even revolt against God with such painful realism as the Old Testament. So if the church is ever able to celebrate its history it is only because it lives by repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

In every age — and no less today — the church needs to be reminded that its preaching and teaching, its witnessing in words and deeds of love and justice have their authenticity in the historical life of Jesus and in the proclamation of the risen Christ. St Paul points in one of his writings to the unbroken chain of telling the story from generation to generation: "For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received..." (1 Cor. 15:3).

That is why apostolicity is essential for the church. It means being rooted in the witness of the first apostles to their life with Christ. The Bible is not only the seedbed of Christian thought; *it is* Christian thought. To preach the gospel is to expound the scriptures; to expound the scriptures is to reveal Christ.

St Luke reminds us also that story-telling in the church is story-telling with a purpose and in a context. It is like a piece of music with its own key and its own theme. In Jesus' preaching in the synagogue, where he focused on an Old Testament text and applied it to himself, St Luke finds the theme of Jesus and of the church: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4:18-19). If we are seeking a purpose for our life as Christians today, a critique and directive, a comfort, a promise, a hope — this is it!

Jesus roots his message in the scriptures. He interprets it to his people in a local gathering in his home town of Nazareth. His message is for that day and yet timeless, local yet global.

All that we call history are events which took place at a time when the people involved said "today". So are we today the history of the church in writing. What shall our history be? A history of complicity with deprivation of human dignity and destruction of human habitat, or a history of salvation? Of institutional triumphalism or humble servanthood? Of the closed fortress or the open

home? Of the pointing finger and clenched fist or of the hand open to give and the arms stretched out to embrace?

If the good news we are called to proclaim includes the life of the church as the body of Christ, then let us get down to sharing the history of our own lives — how Christ lives in us and acts through us. Then let us be eager to tell the story of the church in this city as it cares for the lonely, the homeless, the sick and the suffering. Then let us listen to the story of the suffering church on every continent, the crucified people still longing for their day of resurrection, upheld in their struggle by their faith in the death and resurrection of Christ.

There is one difference between the disciples to whom Jesus spoke the comforting words after his resurrection and the church today. Jesus said: "And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). That waiting period is over. The Holy Spirit is ours through the word and the sacraments. The power from above has come upon us. So act and live accordingly. Receive his blessing, which overcomes all the divisions of our life. Be filled with great joy. And, by the way, remain in the city. This is where *you* are called to be an evangelist, to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to set free the oppressed. Through this church God is hearing the cry of his people in Manhattan and Manchuria. The time has indeed come when the Lord will save his people.

Can Humans Survive?

To be in your distinguished company this evening and to be honoured by the Albert Schweitzer Humanitarian Award is a great personal joy for me. Knowing something of the monumental legacy of creative thought and action embodied in the life of the remarkable person in whose name the award is given, I assure you that it is received with respect and humility. I count this moment in my life in the best Lutheran tradition to be a gift of pure grace.

How appropriate it is that we are gathered tonight in a Lutheran church at the heart of this world metropolis. The healing ministry of this church on behalf of the homeless and hungry, the sick and the poor, roots this event in the struggles for survival of local people in these streets and this neighbourhood. The spiritual and musical ministry of this church empowers and inspires its diaconal outreach. That such an event should be graced by the music of Johann Sebastian Bach which Albert Schweitzer loved and performed, and by voices reading words from Schweitzer's writings, I find quite overwhelming. Thank you for embracing us all in this very meaningful way tonight.

I am pleased that the citation for the award has graciously mentioned two institutions which have provided a basis for my

● Acceptance speech on the occasion of the presentation of the Albert Schweitzer Humanitarian Award, New York, 19 October 1992.

ministry and which indicate the context in which I stand. My remarks will draw on this experience as I reflect on the topic given to me.

The first of them, the Lutheran World Federation, is an organization of churches spanning the globe with some 55 million members. Mine has been the privilege to provide leadership to this communion of faith in a ministry of theological reflection and outreach, dialogue with other faiths and other Christian confessions, development and humanitarian aid, peace-making and advocacy for human rights and the responsible stewardship of creation.

Two years ago the general assembly of the Lutheran World Federation gathered in Curitiba, Brazil, under the challenging theme "I have heard the cry of my people". Few themes reflect more profoundly the spirit of this global community of churches as it seeks to listen and respond to the cry of God's people for mercy, compassion, salvation, justice and human dignity today.

The other organization mentioned in the citation is the Nobel Peace Prize Committee. It has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life to have had the privilege of being one of its five members over a six-year period beginning in 1985. These two institutions, representing the church and the world, have formed the matrix of my recent years. I share the honour tonight with a host of competent and dedicated co-workers around the globe, and with my wife and children who share my convictions and inspire my work.

* * *

Allow me to recall briefly the individuals and institutions who were recipients of the peace prize during my tenure on the Nobel committee. I do so not only because they have had a profound influence on my own life and ministry, but because they have all shaped the history of our generation and offered their own answers to the question given for our reflection this evening, "Can humans survive?".

In 1985 the award addressed the arms race and the nuclear madness, against which Albert Schweitzer had already warned more than three decades earlier. The award of the prize to the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, led by a US and a Soviet scientist as co-presidents, gave fresh impetus to the gathering momentum of protest against the nuclear threat to humanity. It signalled a day soon to come when the cold war would be over, the two superpowers would turn from confrontation to cooperation and the nuclear arms race would be halted in the interest of human survival. Today this legacy is carried on in the work for continued nuclear disarmament, a comprehensive test ban treaty and steps to safeguard the world against nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism.

The following year we remembered one of the darkest chapters in human history, that of the holocaust, when the prize was awarded to Elie Wiesel, journalist, author, university professor, humanist and spiritual leader who had himself survived the Nazi concentration camps and who went on to dedicate his life to the eradication of hatred and the survival of humanity. The neo-Nazi activities which are on the ascendance in Germany and elsewhere call on the world community of goodwill to mobilize a moral counterforce before it is too late.

In 1987 the time had come to look to the people of Central America and to hear their cry for peace with justice. President Oscar Arias Sanchez of Costa Rica received the tribute of the world community for his creative plan for Central American peace. That plan contributed significantly to the attainment of a negotiated peace settlement in Nicaragua and El Salvador and continues to hold promise for the long-suffering people of Guatemala. The crowning moment of the plan will be when peace with justice for all the people of the region has been achieved. Together with the indigenous peoples who bear the brunt of the armed conflicts we press for that day soon to come.

The 88th prize in 1988 was awarded to another future-oriented instrument for peace, the United Nations peace-keeping forces, which employ soldiers as servants of peace rather than as instruments of war. The demand for the service of these forces, from El

Salvador to Cambodia, has steadily increased, enabling some of the most vulnerable sectors of humanity to live in security and peace. Their application has not been exhausted and should be seriously considered in areas of conflict like the former Yugoslavia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Somalia and Liberia, even if it would imply an extended mandate.

A reminder of the importance of spiritual values in the quest for a better future for humanity was given in 1989 when the fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet was honoured for his philosophy of non-violence, which is based on reverence for all things living and is expressed in the concept of universal responsibility for the human and natural world. This decision was seen by many as a healthy correction to a perceived Western, Judaeo-Christian bias in the history of the peace prize and served also to remind the world of the profound relationship which exists between faith and freedom. This is a premonition of a time yet to come when the religious forces of the world fully become a part of the solution of conflicts, not their cause, and it is a reminder of the continued struggle for freedom of the people of Tibet.

The final year in my period on the Nobel committee witnessed the decision to confer the award on Mikhail Gorbachev, president of the Soviet Union. Had it not been for the courage and determination of this man, the cold war might not yet have come to an end. He thus belongs among the greatest figures in the history of the twentieth century. His legacy is yet to be fully translated into a viable democracy and a sustainable social order within Russia and the various independent republics of the former Soviet empire.

Let me add that in spirit I have shared in the two last years' decisions of the Nobel committee. Its decision in 1991 to honour one of the great champions of democracy and human rights in Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi, was prophetic. This courageous Asian leader, who led her people to a resounding electoral victory in what most people hoped would be a triumph for democracy over despotism, remains under house arrest in Rangoon. Her plight continues to be a challenge to the world community to find ways to assist in bringing democracy to the battered people of Burma.

The decision to award the 1992 Nobel peace prize to Rigoberta Menchú Tum is an appropriate conclusion to the Columbus year and a fitting prelude to the International Year of Indigenous Peoples (1993). With commitment and competence she has represented not only her own Mayan people, but indigenous people throughout the world who struggle for the full recognition of their human rights and dignity. The award of the peace prize honours not only her personal leadership, but also serves to awaken the world community to an unfinished task in the quest for justice and peace.

* * *

I would like now to turn more directly to the question given for our reflection this evening, "Can humans survive?" I will not hide the fact that I found this question, stated as it is with such finality, to be somewhat unsettling, even intimidating. Perhaps this is so because it tends to place all of us, individually and collectively, squarely before the question of our own non-existence, our own death, and because we take a continuation of this world order for granted regardless of how inhumanly humans may act.

For some of course the question might be simply dismissed as an exercise in rhetoric, a hypothetical issue dreamed up for the sake of argument, calculated to test the logic of debate. Others will find the question patently absurd, belonging to the dark literature of despair or the preaching of the prophets of doom. How can it be taken seriously by those who have a hand on the pulse of reality today? Far from the question of survival, is not the global community basking in the bright light of hope scarcely imaginable a decade ago?

- The fall of communist totalitarianism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has seen the fresh air of freedom blowing into the lives of millions of people. The suffocating mood of fear and suspicion has given way to an exhilarating atmosphere of openness and creativity, attested to in the blossoming of the arts and the widespread participation in cultural and political life. You can almost feel it on the streets of St Petersburg and in the market-places of Moscow and Warsaw.

- The fall of the Berlin Wall was celebrated not only in the once-divided city beneath the Brandenburg Gate, but in cities and homes around the world. Who among us did not delight to see it happen? Who among us did not let out a shout for liberty and say a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of freedom on that day?

- Or consider the United Nations, which was once impotent to respond to over a hundred conflicts which have claimed the lives of over twenty million since 1945. With the waning of the Security Council veto, the world organization is now gearing up to consolidate peace in many parts of the world.

- Democracy itself is ascendant. Totalitarian regimes have increasing difficulties in defending themselves against the longing for freedom of their own people and against the moral judgment of the international community. The global surge for human rights continues to take on strength like a wave gathering momentum from the depths of the sea.

How can anyone raise the shadow of doubt about humanity's survival in such a day of hope?

In provisional answer one might recall the day that Albert and Helene Schweitzer arrived in Africa for the first time. There was a touch of the colonial spirit to be sure, but at a more profound level there was a stirring, compassionate energy born of resounding hope that skill and caring would finally triumph over sickness and despair. Within a year the Schweitzers were engulfed in the war that was sweeping Europe. Incarcerated in Lambarene as prisoners of war, they were denied freedom and provisions and barred from treating the very patients they had come to serve. Suddenly the hope for healthy life and the promise of peace were tempered by the hard realities.

So, too, the hard question we ask this evening must be framed within the larger context, without romanticism or blindness to the evil that lurks so close to each one of us. It must be asked in the context of the rising tide of nationalism, ethnic hatred, anti-semitism and hostility towards foreigners sweeping Europe today. It must be asked in the hospital wards of New York where the victims of AIDS spend their last days on this earth and in the thousands of communities throughout the world where the great

plague, like the four horsemen of the apocalypse, comes silently to destroy. It must be asked of the victims of drug addiction found in the streets around this church and in the parks of Geneva. Can humans survive? Ask the people in Bosnia who have been driven from their homes, tortured and killed while the world watches from a safe distance. Ask the refugees, over 17 million, mostly women and children, who have been uprooted from home and land, separated from the people and the things that make for meaning and joy.

Or recall the Earth Summit, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which alerted the world to the inseparable link between the two most critical issues facing present and future generations. Speaking of the masses of people condemned to lives of poverty because of over-consumption, environmental exploitation and control of economic markets by the wealthy countries of the North, the secretary general of the United Nations stated: "They are compelled to sacrifice their future to eke out a precarious daily existence in the present..."

He reminds us that the link between environmental protection and poverty concerns not only long-term, large-scale, overarching global development; it is a bread and water issue for this day. I would call it a question of life and death. It affects the daily life of women and children in particular who provide for the domestic needs of food, water and wood. It affects the ordinary folk, the campesinos of Latin America, the indigenous people, the Dalits of India, who bear the double burden of the North's exploitation of the South as well as the affluence and power of a domineering elite in their own countries.

"Agenda 21" of the Earth Summit spelled out the danger for humanity in no uncertain terms: "Humanity stands at a defining moment in history. We are confronted with a perpetuation of disparities between and within nations, a worsening of poverty, hunger, ill health and illiteracy, and the continuing deterioration of the ecosystem on which we depend for our well-being." As if to make that a self-fulfilling prophecy, most wealthy countries in the North are presently moving to *reduce* their development assistance.

Can humans survive? If you travel to Somalia or Southern Sudan in one of the relief planes of the Lutheran World Federation, I can assure you that you will see the children in your sleep for a long time to come. In their eyes you might see your own children and suddenly ask the question in the first person: "Can *I* survive?", "Can *we* survive?"

Of course the fittest will survive, as Darwin put it. When an earthquake hit Cairo last week, those who possessed the means to build solid houses managed to walk away unscathed. Others, the poor, hundreds of children among them, were killed when large blocks of mud and stone, held together with sand and clay, fell in upon them. The fittest will probably continue to exist, but that has little to do with the more profound question which is before us this evening.

The real question of the survival of humanity is not whether the fittest survive, but whether the most vulnerable will be given the opportunity to live, whether the weakest will have the chance to become strong, whether the marginalized will be allowed into the mainstream and whether those who have nothing will be allowed a share in the feast which the creator intends for all people. For many of us the question is not so much whether we will survive physically, but whether we will survive morally and spiritually, whether we are prepared, as Jesus said, to lose our life in order to find it, or whether we will gain the whole world but lose our own soul.

* * *

But exactly what is required of us if we are to survive both physically and spiritually? You may recall the story of Alfred Nobel, who woke up one morning shocked to read his own obituary in the daily newspaper. Confusing him with a brother who had in fact died, the obituary described Alfred Nobel only as the one who invented dynamite and amassed a fortune from the sale of weapons. Jolted by the awareness that he would be remembered only as a man who had developed means of destruction, Alfred Nobel resolved in that moment to devote his life and his fortune to the pursuit of peace and fraternity among nations.

Perhaps it is only when we have faced the ultimate boundary of death and come up against the sobering details of our own obituary that we begin to discover something about the true nature and quality of life itself. It is against that ultimate horizon of our existence, and in the face of the many forces which threaten the most vulnerable sectors of the human family today, that I would like in conclusion to make an appeal this evening. I do so in a spirit which would, I think, have been approved by Albert Schweitzer, who always tried to be concrete and practical in his struggle for human survival.

The appeal is simply this, that the global community of nations begin to provide greater authority to that institution which they have called into being to serve the cause of peace, justice and the welfare of humanity, the United Nations. What is desperately needed is a new, stronger and revitalized United Nations. The present secretary general, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, is aware of this and has proposed new measures, as part of "an agenda for peace", to allow for an increased commitment to resolving conflicts and safeguarding the rights of people within the boundaries of sovereign states.

The breakdown of the immense ideological barrier that for decades held the world hostage to the threat of annihilation has now given way to new possibilities to establish mechanisms of common global responsibility. As the secretary general notes, "even as the issues between states North and South grow more acute..., the improvement of relations between states East and West affords new possibilities... to meet successfully threats to common security".

This is nowhere more apparent than in those countries where totalitarian regimes continue to hold their own people captive. Although the number of open dictatorships in the world is dwindling, many persist. Let the United Nations be a place where this pariah caste of dictators becomes increasingly uncomfortable when they violate the human dignity, rights and freedoms of their people.

After fifty years of existence, the United Nations is entering a new phase of preventive diplomacy, peace-making and peace-

keeping. Inconsistencies remain, however, as seen in its awkward response to the illegal Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. On the one hand, it has been quick to send fact-finding missions to Angola and Georgia; on the other hand, it has been agonizingly slow and timid in its response to anarchy and genocide in the former Yugoslavia. The same is true of its response to Somalia where millions have become refugees and hundreds of thousands are dying.

A strong international family of nations, which is more than the sum of each single member, is a prerequisite in a world that suddenly finds itself overtaken by ethnic and nationalistic fragmentation and strife. A stronger United Nations cannot be carried by the will of a few powerful states. It requires the entire community of nations, as foreseen in the Charter. It must be undergirded by shared human values and by a growing global culture of justice, peace and care for creation. In that it must be sustained through the committed support not only of state leaders, but of ordinary men and women who are seized by responsibility for the survival of the whole human family. Humans can survive only as servants of humanity. Individual survival will increasingly be dependent on the survival of the whole.

Let me confess to having less faith than the secretary general in "the sovereign state as the fundamental entity of the international community". If this is the time to seize the future, then it is also the time to face the need to limit the power of sovereign states to carry out acts which violate the human rights of the people within their borders and to draw the line at barbarism and anarchy. The United Nations has set an example by providing a transitional government structure in Cambodia. It has taken responsibility in the northern part of Iraq to protect the Kurdish population against the atrocities of Saddam Hussein, and has established the protection of no-fly zones over the south of Iraq and over Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Those of us who were deeply involved in the struggle for a free and independent Namibia looked to the United Nations to provide accompaniment through the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG). One might say that this was an exercise in which state sovereignty was set aside and formally assumed by the United Nations in order that authentic sovereignty could be estab-

lished. The UNTAG carried out governmental functions in the name of the United Nations and on behalf of the Namibian people in the transition period until free and fair elections produced a democratic government.

The issue before us is that of testing the limits of the sovereignty of states in order to protect the human rights of people. That there are risks inherent in such testing is evident. It is quite clear that great care must be taken to ensure that the United Nations is not misused or manipulated to carry out the foreign policy goals of its more powerful members. Here the testing principle is not sovereignty but humanity, with accountability spread broadly among the family of nations.

In this I see a special role for non-governmental organizations and indeed for the religious communities working together. In isolation from each other and cut off from their own roots, religious communities have often provided legitimacy for nationalistic aspirations. At their best, however, they have provided the spiritual basis of love and community upon which justice and law are built. At their core the questions of security and humanitarian care are not simply political issues, but issues of morality and faith. What is called for is nothing less than radical change in which humans look at themselves and their environment not from the point of view of being masters of the universe and marshals of history, but rather as responsible stewards of the world's finite resources and servants of each other's right to life.

This is a call for an ethical renewal of the world's political order. It is a call to raise the conscience of humanity through moral, spiritual and political leadership. This is a special challenge also to the churches. In the language of faith, the change of direction and change of heart which is needed is nothing short of conversion. If the suffering majority of the world population is to take heart, a collective conversion is called for.

When Willy Brandt as chancellor of West Germany knelt silently at the memorial to holocaust victims in the Warsaw ghetto, he assumed a guilt which was not his. He made this act of repentance on behalf of his nation and his generation. Although he had personally fought Nazism and had become a refugee from Nazi

Germany, he nevertheless acknowledged collective guilt as a reality for which confession must be made, personally, existentially and collectively. The apologies of South African state president F.W. de Klerk for the system of apartheid and the recognition by Pope John Paul II of five hundred years of enslavement of the indigenous peoples of Latin America may not carry the same conviction to those whose liberation has not yet come, but they are signs of hope that the renewal of human life is possible.

* * *

Finally, I would like to mention an event of great meaning for my own life. Albert Schweitzer was awarded the Nobel peace prize for 1952. I remember well when he came to Oslo in 1954 from his hospital at Lambarene together with his wife Helene to receive the award — my first meeting with a Nobel laureate.

For his Nobel lecture Schweitzer chose the theme "The Problem of Peace". In this lecture he spoke eloquently of "reverence for life" as the guiding principle for humanity's future and called for an ethical mentality as the basis for peace. During the following days the newspapers were exuberant: "This man honoured the Nobel peace prize... He brought a gulfstream of goodwill... One of the happiest memories in the history of Oslo — forever — is the visit of Dr Schweitzer..." One newspaper editorialized: "What Schweitzer has taught us is that we all can be men and women of goodwill. During his visit we have felt that there is in us a desire to be just that!"

There was a groundswell of love and respect for Schweitzer throughout the nation. In Oslo we sang hymns as we marched through the streets, something which does not come easily to Norwegians. Theologian Johan B. Hygen expressed well the creative tension in Schweitzer's life and message in his speech in the city hall of Oslo: "Schweitzer is a wise counsellor in a time when good counsel is scarce. If his activity is humanism, then I would gladly be a humanist. If his activity is Christendom, then I would like to be a Christian."

"Reverence for life is carried by clear thinking," said Schweitzer. Two years later this led to his appeal to all scientists of the world to speak up against the new tests of atomic weapons. "The modern weapons of mass destruction are a cause for great pain and anxiety," he said. A man who in his spiritual voyage had not linked personal morality to active engagement in the political life had come to see that this separation is not possible for a person who takes the future of humanity seriously.

This is the powerful legacy of Albert Schweitzer for us today. It is in this spirit that I appeal for a new global order. And it is in this spirit that I also give support and encouragement to all people who, like Albert Schweitzer and other laureates within the peace tradition, have the courage to act for the survival of humanity. It is in this spirit that we are called tonight to affirm with Albert Schweitzer: "I am life which wants to live among life which also wants to live."

9

Renewing the Ecumenical Agenda

“With thanksgiving to God we note that 1992 marks the 25th anniversary of the international dialogue between Roman Catholics and Lutherans.” Thus begins the statement of the council of the Lutheran World Federation from its recent meeting in Madras, India. This statement recognizes with gratitude the achievements of the last 25 years, addresses the present problems in ecumenical relations and reaffirms our conviction that ecumenism is essential to the church. My remarks this evening on the future of Lutheran-Roman Catholic relations intend to build on the council’s statement, to affirm it and develop some perspectives beyond it.

But first of all let us see this day as an occasion for celebration and thanksgiving to God for the inbreaking of his Spirit to call the churches to an ecumenical agenda through the Second Vatican Council. The warmth, the enthusiasm and vision of one servant of God, Pope John XXIII, opened a new chapter in the history of the church universal. Like Moses he saw the promised land but did not himself enter into it. The Second Vatican Council, although an institution of the Roman Catholic Church alone, has impacted church life in the latter part of this century almost universally. It inspired bold initiatives. It encouraged the people of God within and outside the Catholic Church to become conscious of their faith and to seek contemporary and contextual expressions of the mis-

● Address on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue, Eisenach, Germany, 9 November 1992.

sion and unity of the church. The Spirit breathed a welcome word of change, bringing with it a time for sowing, growth and even harvesting. It inspired initiatives towards a theological dialogue between two brothers/sisters whose ways had most dramatically been separated through the theologically argued rupture of the Reformation. This was an initiative to bring together again that which belongs together by apostolic faith and tradition. So we give thanks to God for his hand in history to heal the division of his church universal and we pray: do it again.

There were people of great competence and integrity ready to face the challenge. They gladly offered themselves to this arduous task of not only detailing the disunity but also seeking ways to recapture theologically the unity once and for all given, and to express it in the life of two still-separated churches.

So we honour today and give thanks for those men and women of God who placed their theological insights and their spiritual gifts at the disposal of the dialogue process and produced such astounding convergence as documented in "The Gospel and the Church" (1972), "The Eucharist" (1980) and "The Ministry in the Church" (1982). It also produced "Ways to Community" and the precedent-shattering models of unity contained in "Facing Unity". It is with great hope that we look forward to the conclusion of the still-ongoing deliberation on "Church and Justification". If a viable convergence is reached also on this crucial theme, a new and promising horizon is opened at a time poor in ecumenical encouragement.

Each one of the impressive list of commission members, advisors and staff who shaped the dialogue of these 25 years is in our thoughts and prayers today. Their labour has not been in vain, as the Madras council stated: "From the perspective of a quarter century we see a decisive improvement in Lutheran-Roman Catholic relations." Allow me to single out two persons whose contributions are so singular that their names are indelibly inscribed in ecumenical history: Johannes Cardinal Willebrands and Professor Harding Meyer. In different ways and having different gifts, they provided spiritual leadership and theological direction to the ecumenical voyage and kept us on course. For their

precious service to the church in its search for visible unity we give thanks to God.

As we are invited today to celebrate and to seek perspectives for the future, it is providential that we gather in the historic city of Eisenach. This is a reminder that Martin Luther did not set out to found "his own church". His mission was to call to repentance and to rediscover the precious gift of salvation by grace through faith. His aim was to strengthen the church, not to destroy it.

But the venue of Eisenach also offers a much needed reminder that the life of the church is more than theological disputes and definitions, more than intellect and willpower. It is a broader spirituality of prayer, poetry and music. In this ancient city the life of Martin Luther, the charismatic translator of the Bible, and Johann Sebastian Bach were brought together as they have been intertwined in the life of the church ever since. Music and song are the most striking features of the church under the cross as well as the church victorious. In the biblical vision of the new heaven and the new earth, the song of the faithful before the throne of the Lamb is an overwhelming unison expression of joy. Bach's music was ecumenical in helping people to transcend divisions of doctrine, culture, language, gender and age, giving us a foretaste "of the heavenly worship of myriads and myriads... singing with full voice: Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!" (Rev. 5:11-12).

Eisenach today reminds us that we find ourselves in a world very different from the time not only of the Reformation, but indeed of Vatican II. More than ever before we have become conscious of the unpredictable impact of the political situation on the ecumenical movement, not least through the events and experiences in Europe during the last few years. The demise of the totalitarian Marxist and atheistic regimes of Central and Eastern Europe did not inaugurate a new era for the ecumenical movement, at least not in a positive sense. Rather we have seen that Paul's warning to the Galatians is a warning to Europe today and to the Christian churches in Europe: "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-

indulgence, but through love become slaves of one another... If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another" (Gal. 5:13-15).

Three years ago the people of Germany marched for democracy; today they are demonstrating for decency. The short span of time from national euphoria to depression, from rebirth of democracy to resurgence of fascism, is a stark reminder not only that political change needs to be sustained by moral and spiritual values, but also that political change does not inaugurate the kingdom of God. Moreover, in this year 1992 we have been called to confess our sins of oppressing and exploiting the people of the South, especially the indigenous people of the Americas, over a period of time that goes back to before the Reformation. Also in this year when the reshaping of Europe is reaching its crucial point, we are called to reflect on our joint contribution to the new Europe. Will it be for the healing of the nations or for further fragmentation? Will our shared commitment to the re-evangelization of Europe be an act of unity or disunity?

Furthermore, as we are gathered here as representatives of the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches in Europe, we are mindful of the symbolic weight of this day, 9 November, not only for Germany but the whole of Europe, and not only for Europe's nations but also for its churches. This remembrance day for the fall of the Berlin Wall three years ago, a day of joy and hope, is also the day on which we recall, with pain and prayer for forgiveness, the pogrom night 54 years ago which inaugurated one of the darkest chapters in the history of humanity and Christendom.

This is the Europe and the world in which our churches are called to visible unity for the sake of the gospel. When we see how churches relate to the perverse forms of nationalism in parts of Europe today, when we realize our passivity and helplessness as churches against the cancer of "ethnic cleansing" and the reappearance of concentration camps, how can we avoid posing a critical question to the churches: is ecumenism a trust betrayed? How can the people of Europe see and believe?

Therefore, the most fundamental point in reflecting on perspectives on future Roman Catholic-Lutheran relations is simply to re-

dedicate ourselves to the ecumenical movement. This calls for confession of having sinned, "by what we have done and left undone", for prayers of forgiveness, for a new beginning. Only when such a spiritual renewal takes place does it make sense to talk about new ecumenical advances.

The question put to us about the future of relationships suggests that we are speaking about more than specific theological dialogues. Theologically qualified work remains a must, especially in the relationship between our two churches. However, our dialogue in the future must be broadened to address issues of an ethical, social and cultural nature. This is the time to involve the great resources of lay people — social scientists, psychologists, pedagogues, philosophers, industrialists and workers in various fields, men and women — to address the many non-theological issues which divide our communities of faith or impede our common witness and service.

Parallel to, but not separated from this multifaceted dialogue of learning is the process of reception. We need to make a joint solemn and binding declaration that we are now entering the stage of reception. Then we must develop the adequate instrumentality for this process. Would it not be possible to have a joint commission on dialogue reception which defines the process and promotes and guides it to its goal? This is not the time and place to discuss such important aspects of this as the definition of reception or the methodology. Let me offer only one remark related to the asymmetry in governance between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran communion.

The Lutheran World Federation needs to develop a consensus within its membership that it can act as one to one in relation to the Roman Catholic Church in the process of reception. It seems imperative that when the final word is to be spoken there has to be compatibility on the authoritative level of each communion, both having the authority and mandate needed, at the same time congenial to the nature and structure of each ecclesial reality.

A precondition both in process and time for such a magisterial act is a broad involvement of the people of God in the reception process. A multiform network of communication, teaching, wor-

ship, prayers, witness and service must permeate the local and national churches. The proposal presently being discussed between the staff of LWF and the secretariat of the Council for Promoting Christian Unity of joint Bible study programmes on a global scale is only one indication of what might be helpful. Let it be said with appreciation today that in the wake of Vatican II a genuine ecumenical grassroots movement is already in place in many churches. And in many areas of the world we speak and act together in support of justice, peace and human dignity far more than most people even within our churches are aware. To develop this global diakonia further is in itself both ecumenical dialogue and reception.

Likewise the representation of guests from other communions on all levels of the life of the church in consultative and decision-making bodies not only helps to keep us honest about each other, but contributes to the continuous struggle against stereotypes and misunderstandings.

May I suggest that as we are entering the phase of reception, we are going to see difficulties greater than those we have overcome up to now. The recent exchange between us on "communion ecclesiology" indicates a shift from benevolent tolerance to closer challenge. The closer we come to each other, the stronger the challenge. This is a testing period for ecumenical determination and leadership.

The communion ecclesiology on which so much of the ecumenical advance has been built is a genuine fruit of Vatican II. It would be detrimental to the whole thrust of a church-oriented ecumenical strategy if a narrow confessionalistic interpretation of communion wins the day. This is all the more important at a time when the ecumenical movement is at an impasse and some are seeking a redefinition which tends to reduce the importance of ecclesial structures and confessional identity and return to a 1968-style of ecumenical populism.

The prior question to all these issues and perspectives is the following: How visible is visible unity? Now we see "in a mirror, dimly", says St Paul. Do we dare to take hold of the promise and heed the admonition of his letter to the church in Corinth and apply

it to our ecumenical future together: "Then we shall see face to face. Now I know only in part, then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known."

If we are in doubt as to the legitimacy of applying these words of the apostle to our ecumenical quest for visible unity, there can be no question about the relevance of the concluding verse: "And now faith, hope and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love." Therein lies the key to the future of Lutheran-Roman Catholic relationships. Therein lies the renewal of our whole ecumenical agenda.

10

Faith and Works

James 2:14-26

My participation as a Lutheran in this ecumenical service in a Roman Catholic Church is in our time not something extraordinary. Such expressions of ecumenical witness are taking in many countries around the world, and are signs of hope.

Our two churches, separated since the Reformation in the sixteenth century, are coming closer to each other in a spirit of truth, love and service to humanity. Last year Lutherans and Roman Catholics celebrated 25 years of international ecumenical dialogue, during which we have exercised all our theological skills and talked seriously together about the major doctrinal issues which have separated us. We will continue to do so.

It is however significant that the occasion of this worship is the World Day of Peace, for it is in service to humanity and in practical acts of love and justice that we see real progress in relationships.

The uniting force of the poor and suffering today is stronger than the dividing force of the doctrine and traditions of yesterday. The cry of a hungry child bears no distinction of creed. Christ has taught us to see his face in everyone who suffers (Matt. 25). Everyone therefore who shares good gifts reflects the love of Christ. And our biblical text from the letter of St James focuses on active relationship to the poor and needy, not in words but in deeds.

● Homily for the World Day of Peace, 21 January 1993, given at the Church of St Nicolas de Flue, Geneva.

The Reformer Martin Luther, by the way, was rather critical of the letter of St James, once even calling it "a right strawy epistle" compared to other parts of the New Testament. He felt that James dealt with faith and works in a very different, even opposing manner to that of St Paul in the great letters to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians and others. It was to Luther as if James denied or at least confused the central theme of the Reformation — justification by faith alone.

Let me say that in the context of the theological discussion at the time of the Reformation this text may have been troublesome for a reason different from why it is today. Because today the call of St James to action rather than words is equally troublesome for Catholics and Protestants, while making a great deal of good sense to ordinary people of faith and to people of no faith at all.

The important and soul-searching question is: what good is it to say you have faith when you do nothing to show that you really do have faith (2:14)? Clearly the point is: "Enough words, enough pious talk; get things done!" It is not enough to say to those who have no food or clothes: "I hope all goes well for you. I hope you will be warm and have plenty to eat" (2:16). If words like that are not sustained by action, they should choke us. As St James says, what good is it to say this, unless you do something to help?

These words become particularly troublesome as diplomats and leaders of the nations face the critical issues of the day. Where there are political issues, the Bible disturbs us and makes them issues of persons: mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers. Where there are statistical issues, the Bible gives them a face and makes them individual. Where there are issues of power and prestige, the Bible makes them issues of reconciliation, humility and dignity. There is a faith dimension to negotiations over food for the starving of Somalia, peace for ex-Yugoslavia, human rights for Guatemala. There is equally a question of faith when we face the great issues of humanity today as the South-North issue, the debt crisis and disarmament. How we act in support of the future of this endangered earth is a matter of faith and hope.

The great call is to translate all these tasks into acts of faith and to respond in support of peace with justice and a human future. The

work of the day is not to continue with "business as usual" on the level of governments and non-governmental organizations or as individuals, but to seek more consciously to do the business of Christ the Prince of Peace.

This is an invitation to see our life in a spiritual perspective of servanthood. As the philosopher Nicolai Berdyaev has said, "Concern for my own bread is material, concern for my brother's bread (and peace and human rights) is spiritual."

Let me say that this does not reflect a naïve or idealistic or ideological view of humanity. It reflects a biblical understanding of every person's responsibility to God and to each other. The Bible gives us a model not an ideology: Jesus Christ who for our sake became poor when he was rich (2 Cor. 8:9). The poverty which threatens the life and future of humanity is lack of daily bread in whatever form. But there is also a hunger for justice, freedom and human dignity. There is a hunger for family and friends, for a meaningful life with work and play. There is a need to give, not only to receive.

"We are ruled by the love of Christ, now that we recognize that one man died for everyone, which means that they all share in his death. He died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but only for him who died and was raised to life for their sake" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

11

Letting the Light Shine

Matthew 5:13-20

“We have seen Christ’s glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth.”

What better affirmation can we give of our faith than these words from John 1? What more appropriate greeting can I bring to you from the churches of the Lutheran World Federation on every continent? It is to reflect the glory of Christ, his grace and truth that the Lutheran School of Theology was founded 25 years ago. It is for the mission and unity of the church that our member churches around the world celebrate with you today. The Lutheran World Federation is a communion of churches. Our churches are committed and bound to one another by common history and by a willingness to live from God’s word. We rely upon God’s grace, sharing a universal priesthood and an ordained ministry in the service of the gospel. As a spiritual, sacramental, confessional witnessing and serving communion, the Lutheran World Federation is nourished by theological study which reflects the light of the gospel. It is to rededicate ourselves to the vision of a shared theological responsibility that we celebrate this festival eucharist today.

As a comparatively young theological institution in an old tradition, you stand at a crossroads bombarded with spoken and unspoken queries. What is the object and aim of theology for people of this generation and the next? Is there any reason, apart

● Sermon on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, 11 February 1993.

from sentimental ones, for maintaining the name "Lutheran" in an ecumenical age? Is an academic institution an adequate setting for the mission of the church?

Your hopes for these days of thanksgiving, reflection and re-dedication have been encapsulated in the theme "Letting the Light Shine". The scripture readings in this season after the Epiphany offer a wealth of material for meditation. The prophet Isaiah calls us to loose the bonds of injustice, to let the oppressed go free, to share our bread with the hungry, to open our homes for the homeless (58:5-9). His is the voice from the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Liberia and from the millions of men and women on every continent and even in this land who cry in the depth of their despair and agony to God for help at this very moment. "You shall call and the Lord will answer. You shall cry for help, and he will say, here I am," says the prophet (Isa. 58:9). The psalm for today enumerates the blessings of the righteous: "They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor; their righteousness endures for ever" (Ps. 112:9). Do we dare to take hold of this promise at this dark moment in human history? St Paul reminds us of the mystery of true wisdom: "We speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches everything, even the depth of God" (1 Cor. 2:6-12).

Then the gospel text for today brings it all home to us in a direct, searching and exhilarating crescendo: "You are the light of the world!" With these words we are brought to the most decisive moment in our life: that of our baptism. In the baptismal liturgy a candle is given to the baptized with the words of our text: "Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). So we are reminded of the great privilege we share with all the baptized in each and every place today and through the ages, to preach the crucified and risen Christ. In this priesthood of all believers which we all share in Christ Jesus, we are called to proclaim the praise of God and bear his creative and redeeming word to all the world.

The word "light" resonates well in our religiously pluralistic age. It joins with "love" and "life" to form a therapeutic religious triad for a new age. In the so-called post-modern society, a "theology of light" is in. Without biblical substance, it easily becomes a light theology, low in calories, consumed quickly and offering no energizing effects for the awesome tasks facing the Christian church at the end of this century. "You are the light of the world" is not a general anthropological or philosophical observation. It is not a definition of being a Christian. Rather, it is a pedagogical way of explaining who Christ is and how Christians should reflect him in their lives. Instead of letting the word "light" explain who Christ is, let us try to understand *light* in the light of Christ. The biblical reflection on Christ as the light of the world offers a different orientation for life and eternity from that of today's self-appointed gurus and saviours. "In him was life and the life was light of man" (John 1:4). A theology of light, love and life cannot stay within the apostolic affirmation of the Old and the New Testaments and the creed and confession of the church universal, except in the context of darkness, hatred and death. It was out of physical and spiritual darkness, carrying the sin of the world and the judgment of God, that Jesus cried on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Therefore we as Christians cannot speak theologically of light and love and life except as a theology of the cross, a theology that takes sin and judgment, grace and redemption with biblical seriousness.

Let your light shine! Luther would be in no doubt about what this means. Nor would he have dwelt for a moment on inherent qualities which make some be persons of light more readily than others. To Luther, what makes it possible to say about any person, regardless of personal gifts and qualities, that he or she is a light to the world is simply justification by faith through grace — and nothing else. To let your light shine is to let the gospel of Jesus Christ shine.

Does not this somehow make sense, even if St Paul calls it a mystery? Who are we to pretend to fill the world with light and love and life? Indeed, there is no place for triumphalism on behalf of human light in a world of want, anxiety and death. Are we not constantly and daily reminded that evil has a demonic dimension which cannot be exorcised by good intentions?

Luther would have said: Let us not be fooled. To let your light shine is not to do good works. But if the gospel light shines on your good works, those who see it may give glory to your father in heaven.

It is not only Christians who do good works, who care for the hungry and dedicate their lives to mercy and solidarity. Acts of justice are there for every human being to understand and to do. And they are being done by Christians and Muslims and Buddhists and people whose only faith is in themselves and in humanity.

So what is the difference? Certainly the role model of Jesus is important, as it was for Francis of Assisi. And so is the motivating love when he gave himself to die for us, which is reflected in the death of persons like Archbishop Romero and the many other martyrs even of our generation. Likewise, the admonition to remain faithful to everything he has taught us has guided many missionaries when they responded to the great commission. All this conditions a Christian for good deeds, to be an agent of light. But the great difference, that which sets people apart and which truly reflects the wisdom and mystery of God, is that through baptism and faith we have been grafted into the body of Christ, our crucified and risen Lord and Saviour. This is how Paul explains this mystery to the Galatians:

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing (Gal. 2:19-20).

So dear and central to Luther is the article of justification by faith that he bursts out: "For what is Peter? What is Paul? What is an angel from heaven? What are all the creatures in comparison with the article of justification? For if we know this article we are in the clearest light; if we do not know it, we dwell in the densest darkness" (commentary on Gal. 2:11). No wonder he insists that "the article of justification and of grace is the most delightful, and it alone makes a person a theologian and makes a theologian a judge of the earth and of all affairs."

Justification by faith sets us free to do justice. The many different ways in which this justice is bodied forth is not dictated by the gospel but by the commandments, by the law of God, written and unwritten. Therefore Jesus says: "I have not come to do away with the law of Moses and the teachings and the prophets, I have not come to do away with them, but to make their teachings come true" (Matt. 5:17).

We need constantly to be reminded that we indeed are the light of the world, but even more so that our light is Christ. This light of Christ is visible, but not divisible. As the *one* light it fills the cosmos as lamplight fills a room. The church universal is the bearer of that light. To mistake the fullness of the light of Christ for my personal little torch or to claim it exclusively for one historic confession rather than the church universal would be to trivialize Christ who as the creator, redeemer and head of the church himself is "Light from Light, true God from true God" (Nicene Creed).

Letting the light shine! How? Remember the words of the prophet Isaiah, "In his light your light shall break forth like the dawn... You shall call and the Lord will answer. You shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am" (Isa. 58:8-9).

The light of God is the light of grace. We pray with the words of the ancient divine liturgy of St James for this gift to rekindle our hearts, to warm the church universal and to shine throughout the world:

Shine within our hearts, loving God,
 the pure light of your divine knowledge
 and open the eyes of our minds
 that we may comprehend the message of your gospel.
 Instill in us also reverence for your blessed commandments,
 so that having conquered sinful desires,
 we may pursue a spiritual life,
 thinking and doing all those things that are pleasing to you.
 For you are the glad tidings,
 the illumination,
 the saviour and the guardian of our souls and bodies, O God,
 together with your only-begotten Son
 and your all-Holy Spirit,
 now and forever, and to the ages. Amen.

12

The Promise of Pentecost

Acts 2:1-25

The day of Pentecost is a day of unity in the church. So it is my great joy and privilege to worship with you in this congregation today and to be a sign of unity in the global church. It is a year since I was last with you. It is good to be with you again as we pray and sing and rejoice in the Lord.

Pentecost is the day when the Holy Spirit was given and the Christian church was founded. So it is a day on which we remember the history of the church from its beginning. We remember those who were gathered as the Holy Spirit was poured out on them, and we remember those who in the history of the church in all ages have gathered for worship and have been renewed and strengthened by the coming of the Holy Spirit. This is a day on which those who have lived and died in faith in generations before us are remembered for their perseverance in faith and hope. And this is a day on which we are united with those everywhere in this great nation and around the world who today openly and privately confess their faith in Jesus.

It is important to remember on this day that in the same way as we say "we believe in God" and "we believe in Jesus Christ", we also say "we believe in the Holy Spirit". When the Christians first expressed their faith in God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, some became confused and said the Christians worship three gods. It

took much study of the scriptures, much prayer and much thought and discussion to reach the clarity which is shared in the global Christian church today that we believe in One God, who is revealed to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three in one. It is the Holy Spirit that reveals and leads all believers into "all the truth", as St John says. And the great theme of Jesus when speaking of the Holy Spirit is that this truth shall set us free. Jesus said to his disciples: "If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples; you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). St Paul adds, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is present, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17).

The freedom the Spirit gives is freedom from the burdens of the past. It is the forgiveness of sins through repentance. It is freedom from the imprisonment in ourselves and freedom to love and serve others. It is to be set free from all the manifestations of the power of the devil in our personal life and in society: hatred, injustice, exploitation, poverty and all forms of social evil which destroy life and keep people in bondage.

The Spirit is a uniting force among all believers. This is a unity in diversity: we are able to express our faith in our own context, with our own traditions, in our own language and through our own culture. It is the Holy Spirit that tells us that Christianity is as much Chinese as it is European or African. In any case, Jesus Christ was born, lived and died in Asia. This is the continent where he rose from the dead and founded his church.

The Spirit is the life of the church. Through the preaching and the teaching of the word of God and through the sacraments, the Spirit makes the church a community of healing and wholeness. It is the Spirit that lifts up our prayers to God and together with Christ intercedes with us before God.

And it is the Holy Spirit that gives us eternal life. Even death is not the last word for a Christian. In our baptism we were given a new birth, a new life, which is eternal. It therefore makes good sense that in the apostolic confession of the Christian faith we join together our belief in the Holy Spirit, the church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting.

It has often been neglected in the life and theology of the church that the Holy Spirit is given to renew the whole creation of God. As we see today how the nations and peoples of the world — in the name of “progress” — have spoiled the earth, poisoned the water and air and brought us to the brink of cosmic disaster, the Holy Spirit calls us to be good stewards of creation. St Paul reminds us that in Christ “creation itself will one day be set free from its slavery to decay and share the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21).

The Christian church has a word to all in authority and to every one of us: “The world and all that is in it belong to the Lord; the earth and all who live on it are the Lord’s” (Ps. 24:1).

So on the day of Pentecost we affirm again the faith of the Christian church through all ages: *I believe in the Holy Spirit*. And we hold on to the promise which Jesus gave his disciples: “When the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth” (John 16:13).

* * *

Let us now turn to Acts 2, the biblical text used in all churches around the world as they gather for worship and Bible study on this day of Pentecost.

We are reminded that the believers were gathered together in *one* place (v.1). They had been scattered after the crucifixion and death of Jesus, afraid of those who had killed Jesus. They feared for their own life, and many of them were in doubt about the message of Christ. Some were bewildered and confused. How could the Saviour allow himself to die on a cross? How could he let evil triumph? Why did he not show that he is God and has all power in heaven and on earth? The time after the death of Jesus was a difficult time of learning for the disciples.

First they learned that the grave was empty. Then they met the risen Christ who talked to them and ate with them, and who gave them a programme for the future and for the whole world: “Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy

Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20). Yes, he even said: "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth" (v.18). And then he was lifted up to heaven before their eyes.

But then they must have remembered what he had told them: "When I go, you will not be left all alone; I will come back to you. In a little while the world will see me no more, but you will see me; and because I live, you also will live. When that day comes, you will know that I am in my Father and that you are in me, just as I am in you" (John 14:18-20).

As the disciples were confused, insecure and worried about their present and their future, Jesus said it very simply and clearly: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you for ever. He is the Spirit who reveals the truth about God" (John 14:16-17).

In the same way as Jesus cared for his disciples, he continues to comfort his followers in every place at every time in history: "The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you" (John 14:26). So the disciples were gathered in one place fifty days after the resurrection of Christ. They were certainly talking together about these events, remembering the words Christ had spoken, praying and singing together. And then something extraordinary happened, something that has always intrigued believers and non-believers alike.

There was a great noise like the blowing of a strong wind. But this was not a wind of death and destruction but the wind of life. It was the same wind which blew over the waters when God created the world. The wind filled the whole house where they were sitting. This is a promise that the house of God, the place where the believers today gather, in great cathedrals and small chapels, in private homes, or wherever it is, shall be filled with the Spirit, the life-giving power of God. It was not only one or two in the house who were touched by it; *all* the believers heard and saw and were affected by what happened. Today, also, to be a believer is to know the reality of the Holy Spirit, to have been touched by it, and

to be shaped by it in daily life. Each person in the room was touched by something which looked like a small flame, "tongues of fire which spread out and touched each person there" (v.3). The Holy Spirit is given to every believer also today, not with great noise or fire, but in our hearts.

Yes, they were *all* filled with the Holy Spirit. The noise like a wind and the flame were God's ways of communicating the truth and mystery about the new life of the Holy Spirit. They heard with their ears, they saw with their eyes, they remembered what had been promised and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Their thoughts, their emotions, their faculty of speaking — all were affected. The Spirit enabled them to speak (v.4). So also the Spirit enables every one of us to speak about the crucified and risen Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

As a foretaste and a demonstration of the universality of the church, the believers on the first day of Pentecost spoke in different languages. This is a reminder of the miracle that the house of God, the universal and global church, which lives by the Holy Spirit, expresses its faith in many languages. It was a demonstration of what the prophets in the Old Testament had foreseen. This is what the prophet Joel spoke about: "I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message; your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams... I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will proclaim my message" (vv.17-18).

It is the Spirit — the Holy Spirit — that enables Christians to speak truthfully, simply and with conviction about God. This is why the church has been able to live on, even when there were no teachers or pastors, no Bibles or hymn books, no seminaries or schools. Simple unlearned peasants and workers, grandmothers and grandfathers, told the story of Jesus. The Holy Spirit was with them and gave their words the quality of conviction and life. And the church has lived on through trials and tribulations up to this day.

Like those who came to the place and heard the noise on that first day of Pentecost, the world today is sometimes "amazed and confused" (v.12) and keeps asking "What does this mean?". And of course there are people today who make fun of the believers, as

there were then. At that time they said they were drunk. Today some would say they are superstitious. Christians are not superstitious. They know that religion is part of reality. Christians are not subversive. They are on the side of life and humanity. Christians are not asocial, they are for the community of all, believers or not. Their life is a life of solidarity and service.

On this day of Pentecost, we are again reminded that the promise of Pentecost is the promise that there is a future for the church, as we read in the last book of the Bible. There is a vision which has its roots in the promise of Christ of his presence through the Holy Spirit.

"After this I looked, and there was an enormous crowd — no one could count all the people! They were from every race, tribe, nation and language, and they stood in front of the throne of the Lamb... saying 'Amen, praise, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power and might belong to our God for ever and ever. Amen!'" (Rev. 7:9ff.).

What Is a Human Being?

Psalm 8

Christian worship and Olympic games — do they belong together? What does the Olympic “culture of winning” have to do with the Christian affirmation “by grace alone”? Are we trying to christianize a heathen myth? Is it an unwanted blessing or a welcome embrace? Does the Christian church have an “Olympic cause” or are we only looking for a place in the sun?

Let me say first of all that our worship tonight is an integral part of a worldwide fellowship. For generations, in all languages, peoples and nations, young and old have gathered in Christian churches and homes for worship and prayers.

Our worship expresses our joy as a response to God’s creation. Nothing human is alien to the church. The game, the competition, the strain, the fellowship in the arena, the strenuous efforts at the limits of human endurance — we are part of it all. Beauty, style, shapes and colours all express the splendour of creation. Breath-taking nature, music and feasts, medal ceremonies and jubilant cries of personal and national pride — all create in us wonder and joy over the good sides of human life.

But worship helps us to go more deeply into what is human, to embrace the earth in a more profound sense and to face our own history together before God. God is the circle surrounding the five Olympic circles. The church must keep the playing and the

● Solidarity sermon in the church of Lillehammer, Norway, at the opening of the Winter Olympic Games, 11 February 1994.

suffering world together as the one world, God's world. Most of us are Olympic losers. Few reach the victory podium. Yet we *all* belong to God.

As participants from many countries are being welcomed to Lillehammer, some will remember other Olympic games. In Sarajevo there are still remnants of walls with posters recalling the winter Olympic games in 1984. Today the large sports arena in Sarajevo is an over-filled cemetery for some of the more than nine thousand civilians, women and men — among them a thousand children — who have been bombed and shot and tortured and starved to death the last few years. There is no sound of joy, only eternal sorrow and cries to God and fellow human beings for help and redemption. Homes and hospitals, mosques and churches are being burned and bombed. Last week people were again slaughtered as they tried to buy their daily food in the market place. Leaders from many nations who once surrounded the tribunes of honour in Sarajevo have turned their backs on the people who welcomed them to that historic city then.

The older ones among us can remember the Olympic games in 1936 in Berlin. Ten years later the world had gone through the worst war ever with the most cruel crimes against humanity. The holocaust will always remain a burden in the history of Europe.

Again it is happening in the heart of Europe: genocide, millions of refugees, hundreds of thousands killed. This time the name is not holocaust or apartheid but "ethnic cleansing". And none of us can say that we don't know. Nobody will believe us if we say: "Never again!" We have all lost our credibility — the churches also — when Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbians support fanatic nationalism, and the small Protestant churches join the chorus. Christians against Muslims in the Europe of religious freedom, tolerance and human rights!

Of course, there is no connection between Berlin and Sarajevo and Lillehammer, between the Olympic flame and genocide. The connection is deeper, in the human being itself. It is you and I, heads of states and athletes, spectators and staff. *We* are the connection, we are the answer to the real Olympic question: What

is a human being? The Bible texts we have read can help us to continue our reflection, to find our answers, to find ourselves.

The story of Cain and Abel, which the Bible has in common with the Quran, shows us that we can find ourselves only in dialogue with God. The word of God comes through a direct concrete question straight into our everyday life: Where is your brother? What have you done? There is judgment as well as redemption in God's own answer: "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." Our answer and defence cannot be: I do not know who and where my brother and sister are. We can look down, hide our faces, but we can never escape the responsibility. We are imprisoned in *our* Sarajevo. Human beings have never known so much about each other as today. We can turn off the television or switch to a more entertaining channel. But we cannot prevent them from entering our living room, the suffering people from Somalia and Afghanistan, from Guatemala and the Balkans, asking, "Don't you know me? I am your brother. Don't you see me? I am your sister."

Sarajevo is in our hearts. The story about Cain and Abel is the most simple and understandable illustration of what the church has tried to say with the term "original sin". Our generation should not have any problem getting the point: Human evil cannot be explained — but it has to be fought. But how?

The Bible texts we have heard show us the way. The question "what is a human being" turns into the question "who is our creator?" "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars... the beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea — what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You have set your glory above the heavens." To "consider the heavens" is not to turn away from the earth. But it is to see the human being in a different light.

What is a human being? On the arena of play and pain stands the person who is the answer: Son of Man, Prince of Peace, Saviour. He is as often betrayed by his followers as by those who deny him, Jesus of Nazareth. He is our fellow being. In him the deepest human suffering and the boundless joy of life are joined

together. In him victory and failure meet. In victory and failure we meet him.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, I needed clothes, was hungry, sick, alone, scared and fleeing. Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for us (Matt. 25:35-40).

Christ suffers and plays in every single human being he has created. This is our splendour. What then is a human being? A brother, a sister, in whom God himself lives and suffers, cries and laughs.

The second chapter of the letter to the Philippians is one of the pearls in the Bible. St Paul masterfully draws the line from everyday life in service to faith in Christ and then back to everyday life. He encourages love, fellowship, compassion and mercy. He even dares to talk about a perfect joy. Doesn't it sound like an alternative Olympic charter? A charter for an "Olympic games in humanity": Be like-minded, have the same love, be one in spirit and purpose? Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interest, but also to the interest of others.

Isn't this true wisdom? Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God
Made himself nothing
Taking the very nature of a servant
He humbled himself
And became obedient to death
death on a cross (Phil. 2:6-8).

This is the biblical hymn to the human being — in play and in pain. Through its fervent appeal that we should demonstrate the same attitude as Christ Jesus it honours humanity, honours all of us. Its anchorage in the Christ-mystery, in cross and suffering, shows a different way to victory.

Olympic games in humanity? Our aspirations and the world's aspirations for a medal rest in him.

Communion and Reconciliation

Two major events in different parts of the world have recently highlighted in a striking manner the inter-relatedness of the communion of churches and the community of nations. Both speak to us about a deliverance day — a D-day — for the nation. I want to focus on the unique task of the church as a ministry of reconciliation as reflected in these events.

The attention of especially Europe and North America during the last few weeks has been drawn to the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of D-day as the beginning of the end of the second world war. Homage has been paid to those who bravely fought Nazism and Fascism on the shores of Normandy and other fronts. This commemoration will continue a full year as the entire world remembers in gratitude the closing of one of the most tragic chapters in the history of humanity. And as words are spoken and the saga of suffering and bravery is retold to a new generation, there is time for some pensive moments also in the sanctuaries, not only to remember the dead, but to pray for the living and for the future of Europe.

A number of questions keep coming back. What has the world learned? Where do we stand today on resistance to tyranny? Are we doing enough to uproot ideologies with their ultimate claim to truth, value systems and even human existence in the name of a

● Excerpted from the report of the general secretary to the council of the Lutheran World Federation, meeting in Geneva, 21 June 1994.

nation, of blood and soil? As neo-Nazism and neo-Fascism creep back into daylight from the darkest depths of human depravity and gain political power in democratic nations, can the churches of Europe grow in spiritual strength and credibility and move to the forefront among champions of human dignity, justice and freedom? The churches also need to deal with the past and the present with honesty and repentance if a democratic Europe is to become a bulwark against totalitarianism of every shade and a guarantor against any form of genocide under whatever name. The answer to a perceived spiritual vacuum in Europe does not lie in monolithic institutions of nations or churches, but in a consensus of values which reflect humanity created in the image of God. Europe's probing question today should be: Where is my soul?

* * *

Nowhere in Europe is this question more present in its urgency and pain than in some of the countries caught up in the maelstrom of momentous proportions which has followed the demise of communism and the end of the cold war. In this situation the spiritual stamina of the church is questioned. Do the churches have anything to offer to the rebuilding of a sense of shared culture and common spiritual orientation and of a value system that offers cohesion to a nation across tribal and sectarian division?

In a letter to the Lutheran World Federation the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia focuses on the spiritual and religious situation in Russia today. This "still, small voice" from an exile Finnish community which was permitted neither voice nor visibility during the time of communism is a precious reminder of what is at stake. Their plea is that in a situation of confusion and lack of stability in every sphere of society, the church must not turn inward to care only for personal piety:

This will lead to the same one-sidedness of preaching, indeed the distortion of it, that in part led to the communist revolution. The church was silent about the injustice in society and left the field, God's world, to a naked power struggle. If the churches are now content only to repeat what they were saying at the beginning of the century, then

they have learned hardly anything in God's harsh school in the course of the past decades.

The plea from this fledgling church is that the Lutheran World Federation initiate "a study process evaluating the situation in the former Soviet Union". They are well aware that such a re-evaluation would require thorough familiarity with the Christian faith including Lutheranism, "an ability to deal with the history of Western thought and also familiarity with the essence of the Orthodox church and theology as well as expertise in Marxism-Leninism".

Although the time of Marxist dominion has gone, the results of the 74 years [of Marxism-Leninism in Russia] are here. Christian churches are faced with them every day. That is why it is necessary, even unavoidable, that the new situation should be evaluated not only as the bankruptcy of a particular economic system, but also from a philosophical theological viewpoint.

This church is pleading for assistance to clarify the message of salvation for a post-communist society and for this they call on support from other churches through the LWF.

For a single preacher, the situation in modern Russia is too overwhelming to fathom and understand in the context of the prophetic-apostolic message. Even though our message originates in the death and resurrection of Christ, Lutheranism cannot be the same either in post-Marxist society as it was before the revolution.

By helping to clarify which elements of witnessing and reaching out are unchanging and which should be questioned by the historical course of events in the Christian church, the Lutheran World Federation, they argue, can support the churches, their preachers and through them their parishioners in the world unfolding before our eyes "as we approach the end of the 1990s and the beginning of a new millennium".

In the search for an answer to the crisis, the material of many years of Marxist-Christian dialogue and of the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue gives a good foundation, but merely repeating the same old themes is not going to work any more. Nor is the invasion of new religions in Russia an answer when "the whole country is

living in a post-Chernobyl situation not only physically and medically, but also mentally and spiritually”.

This is an agenda on which the churches of the Lutheran World Federation should make common cause. In doing so we will continue to address issues which we focused on in our 1993 Council meeting, when we discussed the situation in former Yugoslavia in the context of the theme “People of God, People of Nations”. As ethnic hatred continues to mar the face of Europe, we must prepare to review critically our spiritual and theological legacy in view of the fiftieth anniversary of the ending of the second world war and the birth of the United Nations. If we seek to be attuned to God’s action in history and obedient to his will for humanity, we should contemplate with all people of goodwill how evil can be overcome and shalom be brought to reign.

* * *

This brings us to the second event of deliverance: the inauguration of a new democratic and non-racial South Africa, with its profound message of reconciliation for international society and the global church. A journey through the night of many years of racial oppression, hatred and bigotry, sometimes sustained by theological arguments, is over. The day of promise has dawned, not only for South Africa, but for all of Africa and the world. If this can happen to the entrenched apartheid system, then no tyrant should feel secure. As the Lutheran World Federation has joined the jubilation in Pretoria, Johannesburg and Soweto, we have been mindful of those who kept vigil during all these years of oppression. We stand in awe before those who never lost faith. We honour those who sacrificed their lives. Our heart goes out to those who were forcefully uprooted from their land and homes, who were exiled for the better part of their lives. We try to grasp the pain of those who were constantly victimized because of the colour of their skin, whose childhood was stolen, whose youth was crippled, whose family life was invaded, whose old age brought nothing but sorrow. We admire those who prevailed although their ambitions were scorned and their intellect undernourished, and

those who patiently endured when their rightful claim to housing, education and health was denied by an invading white elite and a system which was an abomination to God in whose name it was created.

How fortunate we are in our generation to have seen this litany transformed into a *gloria Deo*. The defeat of apartheid is one of the greatest prophetic signs for our generation. It is certainly a victory for the human spirit, as it is a victory for skilful negotiations, for the political act of compromise without loss of integrity, for intelligent consensus-building and compassionate reconciliation instead of hateful revenge. It is also a victory for faith.

The churches were recognized for their ministry for peace, always reminding the pharaoh that God will not forever tolerate oppression of his people and always appealing with Moses, "Let my people go." The churches in the townships and the squatter camps have maintained claim to hope through an unbroken chain of worship of the triune God, creator and keeper of justice. Churches have resounded with the voice of the oppressed in a litany of prayers and supplications. At the graveside they have kept faith in the promise of resurrection, not only for the murdered son or daughter, mother or father, but in the resurrection of their beloved country to a land of peace and plenty. Churches have maintained the bond of love in the body of Christ, sharing the suffering of his crucified people. But the churches have also been reminded that every act of solidarity is countered and marred by dissent and division. So forgiveness and reconciliation are needed also in the church and for the church. As the time of healing has come to the nation, so the time of renewal has come to the church in South Africa.

No one has spoken words of forgiveness and reconciliation in a more convincing way than Nelson Mandela. The one who was incarcerated for 27 years in the closest place to hell became a harbinger of truth, a messenger of reconciliation, a preacher of forgiveness, a servant of peace to the one people of South Africa — of every tongue and tribe and nation.

A new day has dawned, and the churches will have to reflect on the past as they face the new political realities. The church has

a mandate to minister to everyone regardless of race or political orientation. That has not always come easily to the church in South Africa or in any other situation of deep national conflict. But the uniqueness of the ministry of the church is to be one of reconciliation. The church is not a political party at prayer. Rather it is the foretaste of the kingdom of God in whose presence no one can stand tall except as a sinner justified by grace alone and reconciled with one's adversary. Therefore, one of the most dramatic spiritual events with a profound political relevance is the "sharing of the peace" as a liturgical and personal act of faith. In the churches we must learn to exercise this sharing of peace with everyone, including our perceived or real enemies. The church should be the space where people in the midst of their struggle are helped to join hands as they pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Where the word of the Lord comes to the people, it is a word of judgment, repentance and freedom for all. If Christ sets you free, then you are free indeed.

If politicians and diplomats can negotiate settlement of conflicts, the church is called to bring reconciliation. In a conversation with President Mandela he thanked the Lutheran World Federation, its member churches and especially the young people for keeping faith with the liberation movements and, through their many acts of solidarity, for hastening the day of freedom. In fact, it is through the anti-apartheid movement that a whole generation outside South Africa has learned what international solidarity is about. It has forged links between labour unions and churches and has been a model for global grassroots mobilization for a great human cause. How can this be repeated in a similar way for the world's indigenous people in their centuries-long struggle against cultural, ethnic, social, economic and religious oppression and exploitation? How can this spiritual force for renewal be brought to bear on the less easily definable injustices of the world, such as the virtual economic slavery of two-thirds of the world's population and the wanton over-exploitation of our limited resources, threatening our global environment and our futureless generation of children? How can our vision of reconciliation be expanded

beyond our confined personal and ecclesial horizons to God's entire creation?

Like the request to accompany churches in their theological reorientation in the former communist Europe, there is also a case for shared reflection on the defeat of apartheid and the role of the churches. The South African churches clearly see the need to come to terms with their mission and unity in a context where they are no longer an indispensable instrument in a political battle. A reorientation to a more "normal situation" may not be easy. Churches outside South Africa who have invested much theological, spiritual and human capital in solidarity with these churches also need to consider how the solidarity within a global communion can continue in the new situation. The sense of ecumenical abandonment is a reality for churches who have come out of liberation struggles in countries like Namibia and El Salvador. Resources available generously in the years of liberation struggle can no longer be counted on.

Is there a case for a consultation in South Africa, bringing together churches from countries which have come through similar political upheavals, to analyze the experiences and draw lessons for the continued battle against any form of racism? Not least for Lutheran churches which stand in the tradition of the teaching of the two kingdoms, such a consultation could provide a much needed contemporary interpretation of our social-ethical heritage and our deeper spiritual mandate.

Is there not also a case for sharing with other nations the way of South Africa — which applies also to Namibia and Zimbabwe — on how to deal with the past? Some nations coming out of similar struggles have invested their passion for justice in various forms of "truth commissions". South Africa, however, brought the issue of the past to its people in a democratic election. Now it is up to the new government of national unity to deal with the crimes of the past. It gives us pause that, even fifty years after the second world war, Europe has not yet finished the juridical process against war criminals. In the case of former Yugoslavia an international court to deal with crime against humanity has been established and will begin to act on documented genocide. Are these ways of dealing

with the past, of meting out justice, of healing the wounds contradictory? Or are we speaking of totally different situations? In the case of South Africa the victim proclaims amnesty for its enemy, while in El Salvador the violator pardons his friends. Is the question of how a nation can be healed after years of bloodletting a matter for outsiders to decide? Who but the Mayan people themselves can declare that the past be forgotten and a new day begin?

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The powerful spiritual message of these historic events fifty years apart cannot be lost on anyone who has "an ear to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Rev. 2:29). In considering the healing of the wounds among former enemies in Europe and the rebirth of one people in the tormented nation of South Africa, there is a theological perspective which permeates and transforms all political observations: that of reconciliation as an act of God. The ministry of reconciliation incumbent on the church is not unrelated to reconciliation between individuals, groups, tribes and nations. Our contribution to an interpretation of these historical events should be a renewed theological reflection on the meaning of St Paul's bold claim: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation... So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:18-20). This ministry of reconciliation is acted out at the altar and in the public square. It is a ministry to the individual and to the nation.







Central themes related to the faith, mission, service and unity of the church are explored in this collection of sermons preached and addresses given during the author's nine years as general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, a communion of 120 churches around the world, with almost 60 million members, who trace their heritage to the ministry of the sixteenth-century Reformer Martin Luther.



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